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A SPY OF NAPOLEON

by

Baroness Orczy

The remarkable history of Gerald de Lanoy, the hero of one of the most extraordinary adventures of the time, one which recalled in the middle of the prosaic nineteenth century the romance of a bygone age.

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Baroness Orczy

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary and have no relation to any living person

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A SPY OF NAPOLEON

THE story was originally told me many years ago by the Duchesse de Lanoy, a perfectly charming, real grande dame of the old school: a delight to the eye with her beautiful white hair, her lace cap, her exquisite white hands. She had the perfect manners of the born aristocrat, and her softly modulated voice was music to the ear. She lived to a great age and like most old people she loved to revive memories of the past. With her it was the brilliant days of the Second Empire: the Paris of the '50's and '60's, of Napoleon III and Eugénie, of the Princess Metternich and the Duc de Morny, and of the great M. Haussmann, Prefect of Paris, "le grand préfet," the magician who in less than twenty years transformed old, mediæval Paris with its fever-infected slums and narrow streets down which had rattled the tumbrils of the Revolution, into a gorgeous city of light and air, a queen among European capitals of fairy-like beauty and splendour.

It was above all the Paris of the Princess Mathilde, in whose salon great ladies like Mme. de Lanoy rubbed shoulders with notabilities who were already on their way to immortality: Gustave Flaubert and Octave Feuillet, Alexandre Dumas, father and son, Corot, Meissonier and Ingres, Charles Gounod, Berlioz and Meyerbeer, and the god of music, the king of song, the idol of Paris and of the Empress, Offenbach!! The Duchesse had been present at the first performance of *La Belle Hélène*. "Such an ovation, my dear! such enthusiasm as has never been witnessed before or since, either in the old Salle Lepelletier or in the new opera house." She had witnessed the débuts of Jenny Lind, of Patti, and of Sarah Bernhardt. She had made her curtsy to every crowned head of Europe, when they came to Paris on a visit to the Emperor and Empress, and her exquisite hand had been kissed by exotic potentates and ambassadors from China and Cochin-China, from Egypt and Japan.

And interlarded with her delightful reminiscences came fragments of the romantic story of her brother-in-law Gérard, younger brother of her husband the Duc de Lanoy, at one time Grand-Marshall at the Court of Napoleon III. Gérard had, it seems,

always been a bit of a scapegrace, overfond of his glass and of the opposite sex. "There was not a pretty woman in Paris in those days whom Gérard had not tried to kiss—he nearly always succeeded, the rascal! for he was the handsomest thing that ever wore those abominable fashions of the time—oh!" she would go on with her happy smile which showed her still perfect row of teeth, "he did not try to make love to me. He was far too fond of me to do that!" With which somewhat enigmatical pronouncement she would for the moment close the conversation on the subject of Gérard in order to give me a graphic and somewhat spicy account of the fêtes at the Tuileries, the christening of the Prince Imperial, and the steady growth in circumference of the crinoline.

"You think it must have been a hideous fashion, I know," she said once, à propos of that; "but believe me they gave style and dignity to women, which they sadly lack these days. There was no walking in them with bent knees or round shoulders." As for her, she liked the circumference of her crinoline to be large enough so that when she stood under the lintel of the great double-doors of her salon, the bottom of her dress should reach the doorway from jamb to jamb.

This was in the '50's when crinolines were at their widest. Gérard was a schoolboy then: he was fifteen years younger than his elder brother, the Duke. "A charming boy!" the Duchesse would reassert with a quaint little sigh, "and when he was sober, most entertaining and witty. Unfortunately champagne became the fashionable wine for gentlemen to drink, and Gérard loved his glass of champagne. I do believe that if he had been absolutely sober that night . . . !" Again she paused and sighed. There was no doubt that the beautiful Duchesse had kept, in spite of everything, a very soft corner in her heart for the scapegrace, and that she looked on his marriage as nothing short of a catastrophe.

"And, my dear," she would add in a more than usual outburst of confidence, "there was Cécile du Pont-Croix over head and ears in love with him, and the parents on both sides more than willing to bless their union! And that young idiot, Gérard, must have been in love with Cécile at the time or he would never have done . . . well! he never would have done what he did."

There was no getting any more out of her that time. She was always singularly reticent about everything that concerned Gérard de Lanoy. Of course, when I finally succeeded in piecing the whole thing together, I was all on the side of the angels. But this was many years later, when I made Madame la Duchesse understand that I had actually taken up the menial occupation of writing

books, and was doing it for money, that she unearthed for my benefit a packet of old letters, newspaper cuttings and diaries all relating to her brother-in-law and the history of that catastrophe which had wrecked his life. It took ages to sort these out and to tabulate them in their right order, but when the tiresome task was finally accomplished, all those old papers did lay bare the inner history of Gérard de Lanoy, the hero of one of the most extraordinary adventures of the time, one which recalled in the middle of the prosaic nineteenth century the romance of a bygone age.

CHAPTER

1

It began in 1868 with the State visit which the Emperor Napoleon paid to some of the more important provincial towns: notably to Lyons. It was a year when everybody in France felt what in these days we would term "slack." The year before had been one of the most exciting ones on record: the gigantic, universal exhibition had been a prodigious success: money had flown like water, and for six months Paris had been filled in its every nook and cranny with foreigners of divers rank in life, all eager to spend their substance in the enjoyment of the countless gaieties which the capital had to offer. Notabilities and immortals of many nations thronged the streets of the gay city, and in the exhibition buildings one stumbled against kings and emperors at every turn.

During the course of that eventful year, Napoleon III and Eugénie had entertained with incomparable lavishness the crowned heads of Europe and the Eastern potentates who came to visit the exhibition. First it had been Prince Tokoungava Tayo, brother of the Emperor of Japan; then the King of Greece. In May came the King and Queen of the Belgians. In June, Czar Alexander II of Russia and his grand-ducal sons; then the King of Prussia, the Viceroy of Egypt and the Sultan of Turkey. In July, the King and Queen of Portugal. In August, the King of Sweden. In September, the Queen of Würtemberg: In October, the Emperor of Austria. One could not move in Paris for foreign potentates.

And in honour of these great ones of the earth there were balls and routs, dinner parties, gala performances at the opera, reviews at Longchamps and what not. Napoleon III had inherited from his uncle not only the love of splendour, but also the knowledge of how to give it value. He and his Empress had not yet lost their popularity, even though the first breath of discontent had begun to stir the serene atmosphere of the past fifteen years. Especially was this the case in the great provincial cities, where taxpayers were wont to resent the immense sums of money spent on the beautifying of Paris. Why Paris all the time? they murmured. Why not Lyons or Bordeaux, Orleans or Dijon? Even the Parisians grumbled a bit: those at any rate who liked their old city,

its narrow streets and comfortless houses; they didn't want M. Haussmann's boulevards, nor the magnificent Champs-Elysées. And why in Heaven's name couldn't he leave the Louvre and the Tuileries alone? They had been good enough for Louis XIV, then why not for a Bonaparte?

* * * * *

But all these murmurings were kept under during the great year 1867, when money flowed so freely into every tradesman's pocket and there was work for everybody, even for the unskilled. The provinces felt a slight repercussion of all this prosperity. Lyons sold more silks and Bordeaux more wines than they had ever done before: so they grumbled less, and the worthy provincials who were unable to visit Paris gave themselves over to gaieties and pleasures of their own.

No wonder then that 1868 came as a reaction. To begin with it set in very cold, and during the first days of January there was skating on the Seine opposite the Louvre, and booths and cabarets were erected on the river and did a great trade. But the thaw came all too soon and with it depression of spirits as well as of weather. By the end of February there had been quite a few anti-Government manifestations on the part of the grumblers, who had kept silent during the prosperous year. They were the first signs of the tragedy that was so near at hand. But if these unmistakable signs of discontent did cause many a sleepless night to the responsible Ministers of State, they entirely failed to disturb the complacence of Napoleon III and his Empress, so sure were they of their popularity. Eugénie had indeed been lavish in her distribution of alms to the needy, and Napoleon had provided the malcontents with enough pageants to keep their minds occupied. Moreover, his favourite dog Nero had just died, and this caused him so much grief, that he really could not be bothered with the countless petitions and memorials which were constantly thrust under his notice. Also the Prince Imperial was making his first Communion, and there would be some grand ceremonies at the Tuileries for the occasion. He was in his way a very great and a clever man, was Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, but perhaps not quite clever enough to perceive that the small grey cloud on the horizon of his popularity would grow to such stormy proportions as to obscure for ever the sunshine of the Bonaparte dynasty; perhaps, too, a certain laziness of mind, heritage of his Italian ancestry, mitigated against the fine qualities of patriotism and energy bequeathed to

him by the greatest of his race, whilst the pride and ambition of Spanish Eugénie threw a veil of illusion over his prescience of coming events, and shrewd discrimination of character.

But despite that complacence which in the end proved his undoing, he did listen to the advice of some of his Ministers who urged him very strongly to nurse his popularity in the provinces. The big provincial towns had always been the most staunch supporters of the dynasty, and in the plebiscite which precipitated the *coup d'état* it was not so much Paris as towns like Lyons and Bordeaux that voted for the re-establishment of the Empire. All this was urged on the Emperor, or rather on the Empress, who was always the ruling spirit in her husband's policy. She was clever enough to see the force of the argument, and in June she and the Emperor started on a round of visits to the great cities of France. The Prince Imperial was with his parents all the time; he drove with them everywhere, and put in an appearance at many fêtes and galas which were given in their honour. The Imperial family was duly cheered whenever they appeared in public, and all the disaffection and grumbling seemed to be forgotten when the little Prince waved his podgy hands to the people and the beautiful Empress demonstrated on her own exquisite person the charm of the latest *mode* in pélerines and polonaises which she had invented.

So it was Orleans first, then Bordeaux, then Lyons, where the Marquis de Ravenne had a superb palace on the Place Bellecour, which he gladly placed at the disposal of Their Majesties.

CHAPTER 2

In that year 1868, when the Emperor Napoleon III and his family visited Lyons, there was in the city a fashionable music-hall called *Pavillon Solferino,* so named in memory of that great and glorious victory won over the Austrians a decade ago. It was owned by an Italian named Venturi, and consisted of a large hall with a stage at one end whereon singers from Paris, acrobats from England, dancers from Spain and jugglers from all over the world disported, contorted and distorted themselves for the entertainment of Signor Venturi's patrons.

On the floor of the hall there were tables at which the public sat eating and drinking in the intervals of watching the performance on the stage. The back of the hall opened wide on a garden laid out with chestnut trees and bosquets of lilac and syringa, which on warm nights was discreetly illuminated with Chinese lanterns. Here a good view of the stage could also be got, together with an amount of privacy in the shelter of leafy arbours which was to some sections of the public a very great attraction.

All round the hall there was a gallery divided into separate boxes where the élite of Lyons society could sit and sup in private, if willing to pay an extra amount of money for the privilege. On this occasion—it was the 15th of June—half a dozen of the boxes had been thrown together and lavishly decorated with crimson hangings and garlands of red and white roses and blue cornflowers. The amiable Signor Venturi had sweated profusely all day, while he superintended these arrangements, and everyone was on the tiptoe of expectation.

The Emperor and Empress had graciously promised to attend the gala performance given in their honour in the Pavillon Solferino. Lyons had never seen the Emperor yet, nor the Empress, and several hours before the performance was timed to begin every corner of the Pavillon was filled with an eager, excited crowd determined to give an enthusiastic ovation to Their Majesties. The ladies were longing to see the Empress, who not only was the most beautiful woman in Europe, but also the best dressed, and speculation was rife as to what she would wear, what colour? what jewels? would she carry a bouquet or a fan, or both? how would her hair be dressed? what would be the size of her crinoline?

See the worthy Signor Venturi, still perspiring, in his smartly cut tail coat and velvet waistcoat, his winged collar and elegant bow-tie. He moves about among the tables, tripping lightly in his tiny varnished shoes, talking to his regular patrons, giving them an oily smile of welcome, kissing the hands of a few great ladies who deigned to be indulgent to the popular Italian restaurateur.

"Madame!" he murmurs unctuously.

"Is the Emperor really coming?" they ask him.

"Of a certainty, Madame," he replies, honey-mouthed, "and Her Majesty the Empress too—so beautiful—so affable—figure to yourself——"

But his fulsome speech was here interrupted by a loud-voiced customer who called to him from the farther end of the hall.

"Ohé! Signor Venturi!"

And as the little Italian pretended not to hear, the loud-voiced customer called again:

"Signor—Signor Venturi!" And the last word resounded across the Pavillon like the bellowing of a bull.

Little Venturi raised apologetic eyes to the fair and gracious ladies and shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: "I cannot help it! Some of these provincials will remain boors to their dying day!"

But he did not dare offend his customers, and the one who had bellowed his name right across the hall was the richest butcher of Lyons. He came regularly to the Pavillon Solferino, not only on gala nights, and one could not afford to quarrel with one's regular patrons.

So little Venturi bowed himself out of the presence of his noble customers and hurried across the hall in order to converse with the rich purveyor of meat. But the latter only desired to ask the same question which had agitated the great ladies: "Was the Emperor really coming?"

"*Mais sûre! bien sûre* he is coming." Venturi hastened to assure him: "Everything is ready! The stage performance will begin at once—and Her Majesty the Empress also—and His Imperial Highness the Prince—Honour, honour bright, Messieurs, Mesdames—Their Majesties are really coming!"

* * * * *

However, the State entry of the Imperial family did not occur for some little time after that. In the meanwhile the curtain went up and the performance on the stage went on. This consisted at this early hour of minor events: tumblers, singers, mandolin and guitar players who still had their way to make in the world. The honour of playing before Their Majesties was reserved for the more noted performers.

At one moment a number of young men made noisy irruption into the Pavillon. They had obviously been dining if not too wisely, at any rate more than well, for they were very hilarious, laughing and singing as they made their way across the floor of the hall, seeking for a table at which to continue their good cheer and at the same time have a good view of the stage. They were a good-looking lot, these young men, and clearly belonged to that set of *jeunesse dorée* which at all times and in every city is acknowledged as the arbiter of fashion and of good taste. They carried off the ridiculous masculine mode of the time with an air which actually gave it style: the high wing collar, the floppy tie, the

extravagant waistcoat, even the absurd whiskers and monocle became them well. The word "aristos," never destined to become entirely obsolete, passed in whispers among the public from mouth to mouth.

"Who are they?" many of them asked, especially the ladies.

And Signor Venturi, seized by the coat-tails or the elbow, did his best to explain.

"The stout one in front is Monsieur de Neuvic, whose father—hem——"

The little Italian paused abruptly: one never alluded to such people nowadays as the stiff-necked aristocrats who were avowed enemies of the reigning dynasty, and M. de Neuvic's father had fought on the side of the Allies at Waterloo.

"The short one with the long fair whiskers," Signor Venturi resumed quickly, "is M. François de Méricourt, the banker's son, and that tall, handsome one with the monocle is M. le Vicomte Gérard Paul de Lanoy, whose brother the Duc de Lanoy is Grand Marshal to His Majesty."

"And the one next to him?"

"That's M. Pierre du Pont-Croix. He is M. le Vicomte's intimate friend. Pierre and Paul they are often called, or Damon and Pythias, for they are devoted to one another, and always seen together. Rumour has it that Mlle. Cécile du Pont-Croix's engagement to M. Gérard de Lanoy will soon be publicly announced."

"Wasn't it Mme. du Pont-Croix, their mother, who——?"

"H'm!—ha!—yes!" the little Italian murmured, for this was another of those cases which he did not wish alluded to in his fashionable restaurant, for Mme. du Pont-Croix, the mother of that young macaroni over there, had been a noted Legitimiste in her day, a friend of the Duchesse de Berry, daughter-in-law of the last Bourbon King, in whose adventures Mme. du Pont-Croix had become so involved that she was accused of treason, first against the Republic, and then against the Empire and imprisoned in the Temple, where she died, so her family averred, from privations and ill-treatment.

No wonder then that the turn of conversation did not tickle too pleasantly the fastidious ears of Signor Venturi—one did not talk these days of lost causes and their martyrs—certainly not in the Pavillon Solferino on the very evening when Their Majesties deigned to honour the place with their presence. What if M. de Neuvic's father or M. du Pont-Croix's mother did sacrifice their lives in the cause of a time-worn monarchy? All those tragedies were past and forgotten. Why revive unpleasant memories?

Why, indeed? thought the time-serving little Italian and hastened to welcome more favoured patrons.

* * * * *

The young macaronis had in the meanwhile found a table to their liking. They sat down and ordered champagne of which one or two of them had obviously partaken somewhat freely already; little Venturi assured them that his cellar contained some of the very best of that fashionable wine.

As soon as the amiable restaurateur had passed the order on to his majordomo and then hastened off to satisfy the demands of other customers, conversation and hilarity reigned supreme around the table occupied by the young men. And when the first bottle of champagne was opened and the glasses filled, one of them—it was young de Méricourt—proposed the first toast of the evening.

"To Lorendana, the divine!" he pronounced in a loud voice.

They all responded: "To Lorendana!" and drained their glasses. All of them, that is, save de Lanoy and his friend Pierre: and Méricourt, having drunk, put down his glass and rebuked them both with mock severity.

"You refuse to drink to Lorendana, you two?"

Gérard de Lanoy, tall, handsome, one of the most distinguished looking among the crowd, retorted with a laugh:

"How can I? I've never set eyes on the girl."

"Nor I," echoed young du Pont-Croix.

"Oh! we know that you two always hunt in couples," de Neuvic put in with a light shrug, "and you weren't at the *répétition générale* this afternoon; but I give you my word, my friends, that all of us here who saw Lorendana have solemnly attested that she is the most beautiful woman any of us has ever seen. Isn't that so?" he added, and turned to the three others, who gave unqualified and enthusiastic assent.

"Such a figure!" one of them exclaimed.

"And eyes!" declared another.

"A *je ne sais quoi,*" sighed de Méricourt.

"Fascination! Charm!"

"Mystery!"

Laughing, Gérard de Lanoy and his friend Pierre put their hands up to their ears.

"In Heaven's name," Gérard cried in mock exasperation, "shut up, all of you. You will make me hate the sight of that wretched girl——"

"Wait till you see her!" declared de Neuvic.

"And if you say another word," was de Lanoy's laughing retort, "Pierre and I will leave the place."

"I bet you don't," remarked the other dryly.

While this good-humoured quarrel was going on, a troupe of Spanish acrobats held the stage. They did their best to arrest the attention of the public with their antics, but the public was not to be lured, not while that beautifully decorated box up there was empty and any moment might witness the entry of Their Majesties with their suite.

"They are keeping Lorendana back till after the arrival of Their Majesties," one of the young men explained, who had the information direct from Signor Venturi.

"I bet old Nap falls a victim," declared, none too respectfully, another.

"If he happens to be, shall we say, heart-free just now," Gérard de Lanoy said with a shrug, "but his taste in the matter of beauty is not unerring."

"It is catholic at any rate," was de Neuvic's dry comment, whilst de Méricourt put one hand on de Lanoy's shoulder and the other on that of Pierre du Pont-Croix.

"If the Emperor," he said, "were like our friends Damon and Pythias, he would be, as they are, impervious to female charms, and his privy purse as well as his domestic peace would greatly benefit thereby."

Which sally was greeted with roars of laughter—such loud laughter, too, that it drowned the distant fanfare of trumpets and roll of drums which announced to an eager public the arrival of Their Majesties at the doors of the Pavillon Solferino.

CHAPTER 3

Mme. de Lanoy was very fond of talking about that memorable evening in June in the Pavillon Solferino. It was a very brilliant occasion, she said, and no one loved pageant and splendour more than she did. She was present, as a matter of course, along with her husband. Though she never would accept any kind of official position in the entourage of the Empress, she was such a favourite at Court that Eugénie seldom attended any public function with-

out having her dear Duchesse de Lanoy at her elbow. And then as the Duc in his position as Grand Marshal was constantly in attendance on the Emperor, what more natural than that she, his wife, should also accompany Their Majesties on their round of visits to the provincial cities? And how could she guess that that simple episode of the handkerchief would prove the precursor of one of the saddest tragedies she had ever witnessed in all her life?

Some people said that in a measure it was Gérard's fault, and that that was the reason why he took the tragedy so terribly to heart. But Mme. de Lanoy would never admit any fault in Gérard. He did no more than mutter a few words under his breath, she declared; even Alfred de Neuvic, who stood closer to him than Pierre du Pont-Croix, did not hear what he said. Ce pauvre Pierre! he was a charming boy, but not entirely sane. *Un détraqué!* the beautiful Duchesse called him, or else a mystic, and she never could understand Gérard's affection for him. She knew all those young men who sat round that table close to the stage, and were so conversational and so hilarious until that unfortunate incident with the Empress's handkerchief occurred. The whole thing was quite natural. The Empress dropped her handkerchief and Mme. de Lanoy, who sat next to her, stooped to pick it up.

Their Majesties with the little Prince Imperial had taken their seats in the decorated box some few minutes before. When they entered the public had risen as one man and cheered them to the echoes: the Emperor stood for a few seconds to receive the ovation, while the Empress settled herself down, with her bouquet and her fan, and then leaned over to say a few words to the little Prince. Mme. de Lanoy had recognised several friends in the body of the hall, notably her brother-in-law and the men with him: she smiled and nodded to them, and suddenly noticed that the Empress, while she leaned forward in order to look at the playbill which the little Prince had in his hand, had dropped her handkerchief.

"What more natural, my dear," she always argued, "than that I should pick it up for her? I would have done the same for any woman older than myself, even if she were of inferior rank to me. There was nothing menial in that—just a simple act of courtesy. Why Gérard should have taken it as a personal affront to his family I cannot imagine. But Alfred de Neuvic told me that he went livid with rage. I think he probably had had too much champagne by then; that, and his rather militant loyalty to the

Bourbons, caused him to exaggerate the importance of the whole thing. Anyway it seems he muttered something which, as I say, not even de Neuvic heard distinctly.

"But Pierre du Pont-Croix had also noticed the incident it seems, and he, as we all knew then, was a rabid Legitimist and hated all the Bonapartes like poison. Not only from tradition, but because of his mother. Neither he nor Cécile ever went to Court. The girl was never presented, which was an unheard-of thing for one of her rank. Pierre on this occasion did not mutter under his breath, he actually said quite loudly, so that it was heard at the next table:

" 'The arrogant upstarts! By God, if I——'

"Imagine de Neuvic's feelings! He, like all the small coterie of *jeunesse dorée,* was a staunch Royalist, but he had too much common sense to proclaim his political views in public, at a moment when a few thousand people were cheering themselves hoarse in an outburst of loyalty. He did his best to calm those two young hotheads and adjured them at any rate not to give vent to their wrath quite so loudly. De Méricourt and the others quite agreed with him: one never knew these days what ears were about.

"Opinions, you know, my dear, could not be expressed openly in public in those days. Napoleon's secret police had ramifications in every city, and in every village in France, and they were as fine a body of men as ever were set to that unpleasant task. That awful 'Cabinet Secret,' as it was called, was ruled over by one of the most astute men of our time, a man named Lucien Toulon, who, I assure you, was as unscrupulous as he was ruthless. Terribly ambitious, too. I know that he was hoping to see a Ministry of Police re-established in France, with himself at the head of it. Fouché—you remember Fouché in the days of the first Napoleon —was his ideal, I am sure. I must say that in those days we none of us believed that there were such things as systematic plots against the life of the Emperor. Of course there were such lunatics as Irsini—indiscriminate and clumsy bomb-throwers who, thank God! always missed their mark—but real dangerous plotters? No!

"But Toulon did believe in them. The wish, I think, was father to the thought. He longed with all the power of his shrewd brain to discover some gigantic plot with the names of highly placed people among the conspirators; I am quite sure that if *le bon Dieu* had not so soon taken the fate of the Bonaparte family in His hands, Toulon would within the next few years have invented the

plot of his dreams, if none had existed in the meanwhile. You have only to read the *Journal Officiel* of that time, you will see that I am only telling you things as they were."

* * * * *

Indeed, the Duchesse did not exaggerate when she talked about Napoleon's secret police. Among the papers and letters relating to the story of Gérard de Lanoy which she so kindly placed at my disposal there was a cutting from the *Journal Officiel* of 1868, in which it said à propos of *Le Cabinet Secret* and the supervision which the secret police exercised over every citizen of the Empire: "It is generally thought by the public that police supervision is only exercised over the well-known members of the Legitimist and Republican parties: that is a great mistake. A close watch is kept over many who, through their official position, would be thought to be above suspicion, for instance: the officers of high rank in the fighting forces, or people belonging to the intimate Court circle; even the maids of great ladies or the valets of highly placed gentlemen, senators, bishops and so on, are all under strict observation, their letters are opened and read, their occupations noted as well as the acquaintances whom they frequent."

De Neuvic, who was older than most of his intimates, knew all that, hence the reason of his warning to the others. Gérard de Lanoy said nothing more, but Pierre du Pont-Croix muttered another curse:

"I hate the whole damned crowd of them," he said.

"I know, old man, I know," de Neuvic rejoined with a sigh, "but you'll do no good by saying so in public and getting us all shot."

After that little episode the young men sat down again as did the rest of the public. De Neuvic recharged the glasses and the conversation, though a little forced now, became once more general. De Lanoy was absorbed in the play-ball. With half an ear he listened to the extravagant eulogies of Lorendana which again flowed from his friends' lips. He had apparently swallowed his ill-humour, at any rate outwardly. Not so Pierre du Pont-Croix. Whether he resented the Duchesse's action over that miserable handkerchief, or for some other reason, he had suddenly become taciturn. Nothing that the others could say seemed to rouse him from his moodiness. Suddenly he rose, pleaded an agonising headache, and somewhat curtly said good-bye to his friends.

"You are not going, Pierre?" they protested.

"Without seeing Lorendana?" urged one of them.

"She will be on directly," added another.

Pierre murmured an excuse, but he would not stay.

"I can hardly see out of my eyes," he pleaded, "besides which, Cécile is at home alone."

"Will you be coming to the club later?" de Lanoy asked him.

"I hope so," was all he said.

He gave them all a final nod and went his way. De Lanoy watched his retreating figure threading its way through the crowded hall.

"What's the matter with Pierre?" Méricourt asked.

"He says a headache," one of the others commented with a knowing wink, "and his sister."

"A rendezvous, I suppose," concluded de Neuvic. De Lanoy made no comment, but he too was looking puzzled—just as puzzled as the others were. However, after a minute or two he became once more absorbed in the play-bill. I have one before me now dated the 15th of June, 1868. On it Lorendana is described as "the most perfect exponent of the art of Terpsichore, the most exquisite dancer ever seen on any stage, one who has had the honour of being applauded by every crowned head in Europe."

And suddenly like a great sigh from end to end of the hall came a great "Oh!" of expectation followed by the prolonged murmur, "Here she comes!" Lorgnettes which until now had been turned on the Imperial box were now bracketed on the stage. The curtains at the back had been drawn apart and the dancer came forward very slowly, with measured steps and a swing of the hips, while thunderous applause greeted her every movement. She wore some kind of Spanish dress, with a high comb in her jet-black hair and a red rose behind her ear. She did not begin dancing at once, but just stood in the front of the stage, close to the footlights, and her eyes, shadowed by somewhat heavy lids, roamed over the audience, as if to appraise it, to judge if it was worthy of what she was about to do for its entertainment.

At any rate that is the impression which her attitude made on Gérard de Lanoy, one of the few among the audience who had not seen her before. He thought that attitude insolent. Wasn't the girl being paid in order to entertain Venturi's patrons? She never once looked up at the Imperial box, or round the gallery where the notabilities of Lyons as well as Their Majesties' suite were watching her, eager and expectant. She only looked at the crowd on the floor of the hall, and at one moment those strangely veiled eyes of hers rested on Gérard de Lanoy. But he took no notice. The girl was certainly impertinent. He threw down the

play-bill, and turned ostentatiously to speak to de Méricourt.

After a moment or two Lorendana began to move; slowly she swung her hips, and then her shoulders. She had castanets in her hands and began clicking them, very softly at first, and gradually louder and louder until in a subtle, unexplainable kind of way the sound appeared like a call to the vast audience to hold its breath and to look. And the audience did hold its breath and gazed absorbed on Lorendana. Fanny de Lanoy often told me that though there must have been close on two thousand people in the Pavillon that evening, you couldn't hear another sound but the click of Lorendana's castanets and after a little time the stamping of her high-heeled shoes on the wooden floor of the stage.

Gérard de Lanoy was naturally also compelled to look. To begin with, none of his friends would talk with him while the performance went on. They all sat breathless, lost in the contemplation of this universally acclaimed goddess of motion. And so Gérard was, as it were, forced to look upon her also.

The first thing that struck him about her was that she had the most beautiful hands he had ever seen. He was very sensitive to hands, was de Lanoy, and though he was only three and twenty he had in his time been privileged to kiss some of the most beautiful hands in Europe—both in Paris and in London—his sister-in-law's for one, and Princess Metternich's, the Empress of Austria's, and the Countess Dudley's—so he was a connoisseur, and Lorendana's hands were certainly exquisite. It was only after a minute or two that he took in the rest of her personality. At once he decided that the name, Lorendana, was not her own; it did not even suit her. It was a name that had no meaning, and no nationality. She certainly appeared quite at home in the kind of dance which she was executing—it was a bolero—and she clicked her castanets as if she had done it all her life, but she certainly was not Spanish. She was very dark, she wore a Spanish dress and a high comb as to the manner born, but she was not Spanish, nor Italian. Gérard, who bore one of the greatest names in Provence, thought that probably she came from his own district—Arles perhaps, or Carcassone.

She was as sinuous as a cat and her limbs and shoulders were superb. But Gérard was quite sure that her hair was dyed; its jet blackness did not harmonise with the colour of her skin, which was like old ivory, or with her eyes. What colour those were he could not say, because they were always veiled by the lids which appeared ready to fall over them at any moment like delicately fringed curtains.

"Isn't she divine?" came echoing to de Lanoy's ears from all round the hall.

Divine? Well, was she? He could not make up his mind. Certainly the public thought so, for even the women watched her enthralled. During a brief pause in her performance the applause was rapturous and Gérard's friends were fulsome in their praise. One and all had before this night succumbed to her charm, her seductive ways and above all to the vague atmosphere of mystery with which she had succeeded in endowing her personality.

That kind of extravagant adulation always rouses opposition in the obstinate, and Gérard de Lanoy was no exception to this rule. The louder were the plaudits bestowed on Lorendana by his friends, the more captious did he become. He couldn't stand her dyed hair and said so, and when they fell on him for being such a Philistine he only shrugged, and once more avoided—very markedly this time—looking at the stage.

The first part of Lorendana's performance was now over. She had executed a couple of elaborate Spanish dances to the accompaniment of her castanets. The applause in the hall was deafening. Men rose and cheered; the ladies waved their handkerchiefs. It was declared subsequently that even Their Majesties deigned to clap. Round the table where sat the young men there was a heated argument as to whether Lorendana's hair was her own, and whether it was dyed.

"No Frenchwoman ever has that kind of hair," Gérard de Lanoy had declared positively.

"She is not French," portly de Neuvic demurred, while champagne flowed freely once more. "She is Andalusian."

"What's that?" one of the others asked.

"Spanish. What?"

"She is not," asserted another. "She was born in Sicily."

"Who says so?"

"Venturi. And he ought to know."

"Bah!"

"Besides, look at her eyes."

"You can't," declared Gérard.

And the argument went on until Lorendana once more stepped on the stage. This time she was swathed in Oriental draperies, with gauze veils which were fastened to rings on her fingers. Her jet-black hair stood out straight on end round her face, which was of a creamy pallor, all but her lips, and these were of an artificial scarlet. The white face, black hair and scarlet lips gave her a kind

of wild, primitive look, which was further enhanced by the crimson rose which she held in her mouth.

"Adorable!" murmured the impressionable de Neuvic.

"I could commit a crime for that woman," vowed another.

"Or squander a fortune," added de Méricourt with a sigh.

Gérard de Lanoy alone gazed on the dancer more critically than admiringly. Half lounging across the table, he sipped his champagne, and only now and then turned a listless eye on the stage.

"She is looking at you, you lucky dog!" declared young Méricourt.

It was quite true. Lorendana was executing some kind of Oriental dance, and at one moment her eyes did seek those of de Lanoy. She was standing on a square of carpet and her small feet hardly seemed to move, only her body swayed to the rhythm of drums concealed somewhere at the back of the stage. Those feet fascinated Gérard. They were bare and, like the dancer's hands, exquisite. He tried very hard not to look at her face, and above all not to meet her eyes. Though he had always been a somewhat promiscuous lover, he had nevertheless retained a fastidious admiration for women as a sex, and he hated the idea of this girl trying so obviously to throw herself at his head. He turned away from the stage more than once, but somehow he always felt a certain magnetism drawing his gaze back to that square of carpet, those small naked feet, the perfect hands holding the gauze veils, and then to the face, the unusually wide brow tapering rather suddenly to a small pointed chin, the full, parted lips showing a faint glimmer of white teeth, and just above the upper lip a tiny mole which gave the somewhat serious-looking mouth a quaintly arch expression.

Was she beautiful? Certainly not according to de Lanoy's standards of beauty. Who would have looked at her, say, when Cora Pearl or even the Empress were by. Gérard, irritated by the rapturous applause which came from every part of the hall, forced himself to criticise and even to disparage what all his friends acclaimed. Suddenly he rose, feeling unaccountably out of humour and determined to turn his back once and for all on this woman—a common dancer, of course—with her air of mystery, and strangely arresting look.

"You are not going, Gérard?" one of his friends asked.

"I'll take a turn outside," he replied curtly, "it is stifling in here."

He had made up his mind to go: but fate willed it that, at the last, he should turn back once more to the stage. Lorendana at

that moment was finishing her dance, and the roll of drums was dying away behind the curtained background. Gérard turned—Lorendana's eyes, half veiled by the sweep of her dark lashes, met his in one quick glance. She took the red rose out of her mouth and threw it into the young man's face. It hit him between the brows and then fell to the ground.

His friends roared with laughter, clapped and cheered as did the rest of the public who had witnessed the incident. Gérard, thoroughly exasperated, now put his heel upon the flower, and while his friends continued to shout "Bravo! Bravo!" and others: "You have all the luck, you dog!" he ground his heel down on the poor faded thing, until its crimson juice flowed from it like tiny streaks of blood.

Lorendana had in the meanwhile made her exit from the stage. Gérard, swallowing his irritation which he felt was ridiculous, strolled off to the back of the hall into the illuminated garden, where at small tables discreetly placed in the shadows of chestnut trees, young couples sat in each other's arms and exchanged words and looks peculiar to their age and to the hour. He felt out of tune with them also. There was no question about it: for some unexplainable reason his nerves were on edge. First there had been the incident with the Empress's handkerchief, and what he termed his sister-in-law's servile act towards an upstart. Then Pierre's sudden moodiness and his equally sudden departure under the plea of a headache. (Pierre was a man of action, not of womanish headaches!) And now this impudent dancer throwing a flower in his face! No wonder his nerves were frayed. Womanish nerves! He was furious with himself, and not a little ashamed. Of course the others were making jokes at his expense. He was the youngest of the party, and de Neuvic had rather a biting tongue. It was all very tiresome and very ridiculous.

* * * * *

He found an unoccupied seat under the shelter of a syringa bush in full bloom. He sat down and closed his eyes, luxuriating in its sweet scent. He rather lost count of time in a kind of somnolence. From overhead there came presently a confused sound of tramping and movement, chairs pushed back and crashing, a general patter of feet. Their Majesties and the Court were leaving, and Gérard, roused from semi-slumber, was truly thankful that he was no longer in the hall; that he was not forced to rise and perhaps to join in the cheering and all the other sycophantic forms of adulation. There they would all be, those time-

servers, trying to catch a glance from the Emperor's eyes, to obtain, if possible, a nod of recognition! An Emperor of yesterday—the scion of Corsican attorneys! Pah! how ignoble it all was! And his brother's wife—the proud, aristocratic Duchesse de Lanoy performing menial duties which she should only render to a Queen!

He waited until the turmoil had subsided, and the calls for the Emperor's carriage and those of his suite had finally died away. From the hall behind him came the faint strains of orchestral music played by a band from Vienna. He looked over his shoulder and noted with a certain satisfaction that the curtain was down and no performance going on, on the stage. The public too began to file out. Although the performance was timed to last until ten o'clock, those time-servers in there found no further pleasure in an atmosphere from which the sun had withdrawn its rays.

Gérard strolled back into the hall, to the table where he had been sitting. His friends had already left and an Italian serving-man was clearing the table of glasses, bottles and other remnants of supper. Gérard sat down and ordered the man to bring him a mug of iced Normandy cider. While the man was gone, he looked listlessly about him, watching the crowd filing out of the hall. Once or twice he half rose to bow to an acquaintance.

And after a moment or two, he chanced to look down on the floor. There, under the table, lay the faded, once colourful flower, crushed out of all shape, a limp, pathetic rag. Gérard stooped and picked it up. It almost disintegrated in his hand. But not quite. He laid it on his outstretched palm and gazed on it for a time: then he drew a small tablet case from his pocket, laid the broken flower between two sheets of transparent ivory and slipped the case back in the breast-pocket of his coat.

Why he did that, he couldn't say. Gérard de Lanoy was only twenty-three, in that year 1868. This may account for a crushed flower lying between the two "tablets of memory."

The next moment the serving-man returned with the mug of cider.

De Lanoy was quite sure he would never see Lorendana the dancer again.

CHAPTER

4

In the troublous years that were to come, Gérard de Lanoy did often ask himself why he didn't leave it at that. He had sized up this girl, Lorendana, in his mind as "a common dancer" who was nothing to him, in whom he was not interested, who, of a certainty, had not fascinated him as she had fascinated his friends, who, in fact, had rather exasperated him with her dyed hair, her rouged lips and airs of mystery.

And yet when he finally left the Pavillon Solferino to go to the club where he and his friends had given one another rendezvous, some unaccountable force compelled him to go round to the back of the house where over a narrow doorway the words *Entrée des Artistes* stood out in bold lettering under the feeble light of a flickering gas-jet. Thoroughly out of humour with himself for his folly, Gérard, nevertheless, took up his stand, leaning against the wall close to that door. There was a small crowd of people collected round there at the moment, quidnuncs or admirers of the various performers, who were just trooping out, who met their friends and then walked away in their company. Gérard watched them lazily, indifferently, vaguely wondering whether Lorendana had already gone, whether he would see her presently, and whether she would have taken off the rouge from her lips and the dye out of her hair.

Another quarter of an hour or so went by, while gradually the crowd melted away. Lorendana had surely gone by now, so thought Gérard, and with a curious sense half of relief, half of disappointment, he made a move to go, when suddenly he heard a man's voice and then a woman's, and the next moment the dancer appeared in the doorway. She was talking to someone over her shoulder, and thus stood for the moment under the light, which just caught the tip of her nose and chin. Gérard, determined not to be seen, drew back as far as he could into the darkness.

The girl stepped out into the road. A man followed her, and when they were both out in the open he took her familiarly by the arm. As far as Gérard could perceive through the gloom he was

an ill-clad, rather slouchy-looking fellow, probably one of the performers at the Pavillon. The two of them started to walk straight ahead, but after the first half-dozen steps Lorendana gave a little cry of distress.

"Dio mio!" she exclaimed; "my ring!"

She turned abruptly back to the stage-door, but the man forestalled her.

"Let me go," he said, and added, "Where did you leave it?"

"In the dressing-room—run, caro, quickly, before anyone else gets it!"

She stood for a few minutes watching the man while he disappeared through the stage-door. The light from the gas-jet fell fully upon her now. She wore a modish little bonnet tied with a wide bow of ribbon under her chin, under the brim of her hat her hair showed in clusters of small curls. She certainly had not taken the dye out of it, nor the rouge from her lips. Gérard did not notice what else she wore: it was her face he studied by the flickering gas-light, wondering what had so fascinated his friends. The eyes probably, for she had a trick and play of the eyelids which would tantalise any man; and then there was that coquettish mole just above the upper lip—surely, that was it.

"Very like a spicy savoury," Gérard thought, "of which a man can always eat, even if he be not hungry."

And suddenly he became aware that Lorendana was looking at him. Though the darkness around where he stood was as dense as a wall, yet he knew that she had seen him and was looking at him. He didn't move, but strive as he might he could not take his eyes off her face. After a minute or two she said slowly, and in a soft, toneless voice:

"The top floor of 16, Rue Grenelle. There is no performance on Mondays. I always rest."

Had Gérard been less determined to remain concealed, he surely would have burst out laughing then. "No performance on Mondays . . . 16, Rue Grenelle . . ." An assignation apparently. The girl was crazy, of course, to think that he, who was so obviously a gentleman, would climb five flights of stairs to embark on a vulgar intrigue with a common dancer.

Lorendana, having said her say, went back to the stage-door, and Gérard could no longer see her face as the light was just above her head and the brim of her bonnet threw a deep shadow over all but her chin. Indeed the whole incident had been so brief and so perplexing, that Gérard began to think that the girl's words had not been addressed to him at all, but to someone else inside

the building. While he was debating this in his mind, the man came back. Apparently he had not found the ring, for he reiterated more than once:

"Cara mia——! there is no ring—anywhere!"

He took her once more familiarly by the arm, and together they walked away, the girl saying quite coolly as she went:

"Never mind, Antonio. Perhaps I left it at home."

While the darkness swallowed the two of them up, Gérard at last made up his mind to go. As in the Pavillon earlier in the evening, he was in a state of unreasoning exasperation. He longed to run after those two and to knock that egregious Antonio down. 16, Rue Grenelle! That is where they were going: that vulgar Italian mountebank and the girl with the dyed hair and the impossibly scarlet lips. They were lovers probably! Strangely enough, it exasperated Gérard de Lanoy to think that they were. It had nothing whatever to do with him—nothing whatever, and yet it exasperated him, irritated him almost beyond endurance to think of those two having a happy time on that top floor in Rue Grenelle. Like to like! he thought, and that was as it should be. But why in the name of a dog did the girl presume to suggest an assignation to him. For she had suggested it: he no longer had any doubt of that, and how the —— did she know that he was standing there in the dark watching for her to come out at the stage-door?

At this point in his reflections Gérard stumbled against a stone in the road, very nearly lost his balance, too. Time he chased those idiotic thoughts away and went to the club where his friends would be waiting, wondering perhaps what had become of him. If only they did not begin to chaff him about that stupid rose! If only they did not mention Lorendana's name! Gérard registered this pious wish, for, if the girl's name was as much as mentioned, he would of a certainty lose his temper and there would ensue an unholy row.

CHAPTER

5

But Gérard need not have worried over that. Happy-go-lucky, hilarious, light-hearted he and his friends might be, but they were not empty-headed. Not empty. They were fond of pleasures, of good cheer, good wine, fine clothes; they knew a good horse when they saw one, shot straight, wielded foil or épée, or sabre. They had money, birth, position, danced to perfection; some were artists by temperament and in their idle hours sketched, played the piano, or wrote verses. But with all that they were not empty-headed. Their brains were for ever at work with schemes and projects which to more sober people—or to sycophants—would seem the height of folly; but to them these projects meant the salvation of France, the restoration of the only kind of government which they believed was sanctioned by God—that of the old traditional monarchy.

The little man from Corsica—an upstart if ever there was one—had been all very well. France had needed a strong personality to pull her out of the mire of those years of revolution and bloodshed; military dictatorship was bound to follow anarchy. Well, he had had his rise and his abysmal fall! France through him had tasted supreme glory and catastrophic shame. But the past was the past, and both glory and shame must be relegated to oblivion.

What these young men felt, however, was that France was once more heading for humiliation, from which this time she might never recover. The same ambition for military glory, the same disregard for the welfare of the nation, and the same egotistical love of grandeur was pushing the third Napoleon down into the same abyss which had engulfed a man infinitely greater than himself. And in his inevitable fall he, too, would drag France and her good name down with him.

These were the thoughts, and this the prescience which filled the minds of the younger generation, three years before the catastrophe actually took place. The Duchesse de Lanoy was wrong when she assured me that conspiracies against the Empire and the person of Napoleon III only existed in the imagination of M. Lucien Toulon and his *Cabinet Secret*. Plots were hatched in every

important city in France, and wherever the Emperor appeared in public there were jealous eyes watching his movements, watching for an opportunity to rouse the people of France against this dynasty of upstarts, and to bring them back to their true loyalty to their God and to their King.

It was among the scions of the old French noblesse that most of these projects found birth. Monarchist clubs were organised in the big cities, the members of which met in one another's apartments for debates and discussions. To the honour of these young men be it said that they never contemplated crime. Not as a corporate body at any rate. There might be a few isolated instances—the case of Pierre du Pont-Croix was one—where a man, smarting under wrongs done to his family or kindred, would lose his mental balance and perhaps dream in solitude of a bomb or pistol shot that would put an end to the hated dynasty of the Bonapartes once and for all.

But such mad schemes were never discussed seriously, and certainly never approved of by men like de Neuvic or Méricourt or Gérard de Lanoy. It was more of bloodless revolutions that they dreamed: some *coup d'état* that would bring the whole of France to its senses, and cause her to proclaim her only rightful ruler, Henri V, by divine right, King of France.

* * * * *

On this 15th evening of June, after the gala performance at the Pavillon Solferino, a meeting was held among friends in de Neuvic's apartment situate on the second floor of a house in the Rue de Rome. De Méricourt was there and young de Nauplie, Antoine de Gié, and his cousin André Clamecy, and several others. Though it was past eleven o'clock, nothing very serious had so far been discussed, for two important members of this informal club had not yet arrived. They were the two bosom friends, Gérard de Lanoy and Pierre du Pont-Croix.

"I didn't like the look of Pierre when he went off this evening," de Neuvic remarked thoughtfully, when the names of the two absentees came on the tapis.

"He certainly had the intention of seeing the show with us and then coming on here," said one of the others.

"Then why did he leave all of a sudden?" queried another.

"He got upset by seeing Mme. de Lanoy play waiting-maid to Bonaparte's wife."

"He is very bitter about those Bonapartes," mused de Méricourt.

"Can you wonder, after the way his mother was treated? I know if it were my case I should feel like murder."

"It was an abominable thing. Poor soul! Do you know, I was told by the priest who saw her when she was dying that she was nothing but skin and bones. She had been practically starved to death in that horrible prison."

"Poor old Pierre! No wonder he goes off his head sometimes."

"I am always afraid," de Neuvic put in, "that he will do something rash one of these days."

"How do you mean?"

"When a man's nerves are so terribly on edge . . ."

De Neuvic paused and gave a significant shrug..

"I see what you mean," one of the others murmured, "but I don't think Pierre would let himself go like that."

"He has his sister to think of."

"And Gérard's influence is a good one, even though he is such a scatterbrain."

"I suppose we shall hear of that engagement soon."

"Gérard and Cécile du Pont-Croix, you mean?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, that's a foregone conclusion . . .!"

The conversation now drifted into lighter channels. But still no sign of the two absentees. Once or twice de Neuvic went to the front door of his apartment, and out on the landing, to listen for the familiar footfalls on the stairs. But in vain.

"Funny they should both be late," he remarked at one time.

"They must have met and gone together somewhere," de Méricourt suggested.

"But where?"

They were not really anxious, only puzzled, because Damon and Pythias were usually very keen on these political debates.

De Neuvic threw open a window and glanced up and down the street. No sign of any passer-by, but from some little distance away there suddenly came the sound of clattering hoofs and rattle of carriage wheels, and suddenly a short, sharp sound, like a report of a pistol, followed by a confused tumult as of people running and women screaming, loud calls, and a trumpet blast, more clattering of horses' hoofs and rumble of carriage wheels. When de Neuvic turned away from the window and once more faced his friends, there was a troubled look in his eyes—almost a scared look. Some of the others had jumped to their feet. Another window was thrown open, and some of them leaned out, and glanced anxiously up and down the street.

There was nothing to see, and all they could hear was that confused tumult, not very far away, of people running, and of women shrieking and the gradual dying-down of the clatter of horses and rumble of carriage wheels. With one accord they picked up their hats and sticks, and started out to find out what was happening.

Only de Neuvic remained behind.

"I'll wait," he said, "in case . . ."

CHAPTER 6

Gérard de Lanoy had walked away from the Pavillon Solferino with the intention of going straight to the Rue de Rome, to meet his friends in de Neuvic's apartment. He did not feel his usual light-hearted, care-free self; so many things seemed to have happened this night to set his nerves on edge. Nerves! My God! he never knew before this that he had any. He remembered afterwards saying to himself: "A visit to my lovely sister-in-law would be the best thing for me—far better than discussing *coups d'état* which never come off."

And to me, when she dwelt on the terrible events of that night, Fanny de Lanoy would say with a sigh: "It would indeed have been infinitely better for the poor boy!"

Gérard had sighed for her company after he had stumbled in the dark alley outside the back premises of the Pavillon, and nearly measured his elegant self on the muddy road. But he had promised to meet his friends in the Rue de Rome, so he walked on more sedately, though still dwelling on the extraordinary phenomenon of his exacerbated nerves. It all began with that Lorendana, and the fulsome eulogies of her, of his friends; then her impertinence in throwing a flower in his face, and finally her going off with that vulgar Italian, after presuming to give him, Gérard, an assignation in her apartment.

And from thinking of the dancer, Gérard's mind switched on to his friend Pierre. He didn't like the look of him when he left the hall. Dear old Pierre was wont to go off the hooks sometimes, if anything occurred to remind him of his mother's sufferings; for Pierre had been a real French son and had worshipped his mother;

and he had been just old enough at the time of her death to feel the full tragedy of it, and to be conscious of the first stirrings of a passionate longing for revenge. Dear old Pierre! the truest friend man ever had! And pretty little Cécile! "Ah, well," thought Gérard, as he stepped out more briskly, "I suppose we'll get married some day soon. Pity I am so fond of her. I might have fallen passionately in love with pretty little Cécile!"

The streets in this part of the town were quite quiet, but as de Lanoy turned into the wide Rue de l'Aigle he became aware of several groups of quidnuncs standing about on the edge of the pavement as if they expected to see something. He also noticed that these people were all glancing down the street in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville, the large municipal building in the Place immediately facing the end of the Rue de l'Aigle, and that all along the street gendarmes were posted at intervals. Gérard, raising his hat, ventured to accost one of them and to ask what the crowd was expecting to see. The gendarme looked him up and down first, then seeing that he had to do with a gentleman, he touched the edge of his *képi* and gave the desired information.

"Their Majesties with their suite will be passing along here directly. They have been attending a reception given in their honour by M. le Maire. They will be driving home this way to the Palais Ravenne."

Whereupon Gérard remembered that he and several of his friends had received an invitation for the fête, but that they had unanimously decided not to go to it. He thanked the gendarme for his courtesy, and then walked on as far as the angle of the Place Bellecour. Here there was quite a crowd, for the Palais Ravenne occupied half one side of the Place, and it is to be supposed that the worthy Lyonnais were eager to catch a glimpse, if not of Their Majesties themselves, then at least of their carriage and escort. But Gérard de Lanoy was certainly not of that way of thinking. He didn't want to see the Bonapartes again, and he hated their pageants, and assumptions of royalty, their gilded coach and mounted guard. But the crowd in the Place was so dense by now that he could not get along, so he came to a halt at the angle of the Rue de l'Aigle and the Place Bellecour. He got squeezed up against the wall of a house, and there were four or five rows of sightseers between him and the middle of the road.

He had already made up his mind to possess his soul in patience, hoping that it would not be long before the show was over, when he heard from the direction of the Hôtel de Ville, first a fanfare of trumpets followed immediately by the clatter of horses, the

jingle of accoutrements and the rumble of coach wheels. Also the cheering, distant at first, then taken up by the crowd, the whole length of the street, as the carriage came rattling nearer and nearer. From the houses all down the street and in the Place Bellecour came the banging and rattle of volets and windows being thrown open. Lights appeared here and there, and people, some of them in their nightclothes, leaned out of the windows of their houses.

And in the house exactly facing the spot where Gérard de Lanoy was standing, at a ground-floor window, there was Pierre du Pont-Croix. Gérard happened to look up. He was tall and could see over the heads of the crowd in front of him. It was Pierre all right. He was leaning on the window-sill, and behind him the room was in darkness. As in a flash, Gérard saw the whole of the coming tragedy before him. Pierre, his friend! The best friend man ever had! And Cécile, the small, pretty sister of his friend, almost his fiancée. And there would be the tragedy in a few minutes—seconds perhaps—and he, Gérard, squeezed against the wall—a crowd, a roadway, and yet another crowd, between him and Pierre, and he unable to do anything—anything except look —and wait.

He knew—he guessed—yet he could do nothing. He saw it all in a flash before it happened—he saw it all, and could do nothing. Nothing! He tried to get to Pierre, tried like a madman to push his way through the crowd, but at that very moment the mounted guard came thundering down the street, between him and the house opposite. And while the escort rode by, with much jingling of steel and patter of hoofs, Gérard could not see the house opposite, but he knew that Pierre was still there at the window, biding his time.

Not three hundred metres away now, the Emperor's carriage, drawn by four superb bays, was coming at a steady pace—and Gérard heard more and more distinctly the rumble of the wheels and the intermittent fanfare of trumpets.

Between the last of the rear-guard and the leaders of the team in the coach there was a gap of a hundred metres or so, and through that gap Gérard once more caught sight of the house opposite, and of Pierre leaning out of the ground-floor window. He had a pistol in his hand now—ready to take aim. Gérard saw it quite distinctly; and then he saw a man, dressed in dark clothes, standing at the outside door of the house. He waited there for a moment probably to ring the concierge's bell; then the door was opened and he slipped inside. And Gérard knew that the man in

the dark clothes was one of Toulon's secret police, and that he had seen Pierre at the window with a pistol in his hand, ready to take aim.

* * * * *

It all occurred in the space of a few seconds. Less than a minute before Their Majesties' carriage thundered past, Gérard saw in the room behind Pierre a hand reach out of the darkness and grasp his arm. The shot went off. A great din filled Gérard's ears. A confused tumult of people running, women screaming. The gilded coach tore past at break-neck speed, dragged by the terrified horses; the rear-guard passed by like a tornado, and the thought of which Gérard was chiefly conscious was of the terrible futility of it all. Pierre was mad! Of course he was mad! What chance had he? Even if—— But he had no chance! None whatever. The eyes and ears of the *Cabinet Secret* were all around him. He didn't see them, poor deluded madman that he was! but they were there watching through the darkness. And they had frustrated him! And now he would have to pay the penalty. Oh, the tragedy of it! The awful, miserable, purposeless tragedy!

After the rear-guard had thundered past, and the crowd had fled in all directions like frightened sheep, Gérard hastened across the road. The ground-floor window of that house of doom was still open, but the room inside was pitch-dark. Gérard could see no one. There were lights in the upper floors, and sounds of shrill chattering came to his ears from open windows up there; but the ground-floor was in total darkness. He rang the concierge's bell, but there was no response. He rang again and again, but the porte-cochère remained closed. Obviously orders had been given. After a time a police patrol came along, and the man in command asked him roughly what he was doing there. Without waiting for a reply he ordered Gérard to move on.

"On n'entre pas là!" he said curtly.

No one was allowed to enter the house, from the window of which an assassin had dared to aim a pistol at His Majesty the Emperor. The police patrol was aligned in front of the house, and de Lanoy, unless he had wished to run his own head into a noose, was forced to move away.

He went straight to the apartment where his brother and sister-in-law were lodging. The Duke had not yet returned from attending on His Majesty, but Mme. de Lanoy, fortunately for Gérard, had been too tired to go to the reception at the Hôtel de Ville. He told her, as coherently as he could, just what had happened.

"My first thought was for that dear child, Cécile," the Duchesse added when she related to me this tragic portion of her brother-in-law's history. "Though it was so late, I ordered the coachman to be hauled out of bed, and I drove to the lodgings which that unfortunate young Pierre and Cécile occupied the other side of the river. I have had to accomplish many unpleasant tasks in my day," the dear old lady went on, whilst tears rolled down her cheeks, "but none so heart-rending as when I had to tell that sweet child that the brother whom she idolised had committed the act of a madman, and would in all likelihood suffer the extreme penalty. I brought the poor girl home with me, and spent the night by her side. We neither of us slept. We just sat hand in hand, or else we knelt and prayed."

CHAPTER 7

The *trial* of Pierre du Pont-Croix for the attempted assassination of the Emperor Napoleon III lasted three days. It is all recorded in the *Journal Officiel* of the time, and Mme. de Lanoy gave me all the cuttings from the newspaper which she had collected. But nothing was known about the trial outside the four walls of the Court of Justice which in the end condemned young du Pont-Croix to death, for conspiracy and treason against the State. The public was kept in ignorance of the proceedings up to the very last, when sentence was pronounced, and execution ordered to take place within so many hours.

But news has a way of getting about with extraordinary rapidity. Rumours fly on unseen wings, and the fact that "the dastardly traitor" who had tried to assassinate the Emperor and Empress was to be shot in the early morning of the 16th in the Fosse de la Part-Dieu, came to the ears of all those who were eagerly waiting to hear. Executions in France during these troubled years of the Second Empire still took place in public. Especially was this barbarous custom or law enforced in the case of crimes against the State, or the persons of the Imperial family. The sight, it was assumed, would act as a deterrent to other hotheads. And the good Lyonnais, in their spontaneous outburst of loyalty, were not going to be deprived of the spectacle of seeing a "cowardly assassin"—

so the wretched young man was called—pay the penalty of his crime. That he had failed in his abominable attempt was through no compunction on his own part: it was due to the vigilance of M. Toulon's marvellous organisation, which knew how to ferret out traitors however hidden their burrows might be. The employé of the *Cabinet Secret,* who had been on the track of the abominable traitor, deserved well of his country: but for him a life of priceless worth would have fallen to the hand of an assassin.

For the time being, the popularity of the Imperial family was once more in the ascendant—at any rate in Lyons.

As soon as the first rosy light of dawn spread over the city on that glorious morning in June, gaffers and quidnuncs could be seen hastening in the direction of the Fosse de la Part-Dieu where, rumour had it, the execution would presently take place. They all wanted front places to view this spectacle, and it would be first come first served round the low wall which bordered the Fosse on two sides.

"Where art thou going, my man?" many a housewife asked of her husband that morning.

"To see that dastardly assassin shot," was the usual reply.

Some of the women protested. Nothing would induce them to go, and they did their best to persuade their menfolk to stay at home. So swiftly had rumour got about, that they had already heard that "the traitor" was young and good-looking.

"Poor young man!" the mothers murmured with a sigh while they prepared their husband's breakfast. They had also heard that Pierre due Pont-Croix had idolised his mother and that he had tried to kill the Emperor out of revenge for her death.

But loyalty being the order of the day, they did not dare say much.

"Art thou in sympathy with a traitor?" was what the men said, and so the women held their tongues.

Some of them, on the other hand, were just as keen on seeing the brutalising spectacle as the men. Nature has curious kinks sometimes, and the psychology of women will for ever remain an unsolved puzzle to the student and the scientist. Certain it is that the Lyonnaises, in not inconsiderable numbers, did on this beautiful morning of June swell the crowd that stood round the Fosse de la Part-Dieu to watch a young man—not yet five-and-twenty—die a shameful death.

"My dear," said Mme. de Lanoy to me, when she spoke of that tragic morning, "imagine my feelings when I heard that not only a number of young men of our *monde,* but several ladies—well,

we'll call them ladies—went to see that awful spectacle, as they would go to a theatre. Of course not one of them belonged to the real aristocracy. They were people belonging to the Court circle, sycophants and toadies, who hoped to obtain some favour or other by boasting openly that they had enjoyed seeing the traitor shot; but for any woman of decent birth to stand by and see a young man of her own world shot before her eyes, is one of the most revolting things I ever heard of in all my life."

But it did happen, nevertheless. According to the *Eclaireur de Lyon*, a highly reputable and trustworthy paper, the newly created Marquis de Ravenne was there, and his wife was with him. She wore no disguise: everyone could see her, and the Ravennes were well known in Lyons. And there were others, too, whose names sank into oblivion after the fall of the Empire, but who at the time were people of consideration and position. These ladies—since they claimed to be ladies—pushed their way to the front, or sat on the low wall which overlooked the Fosse, so as to get the best possible view of the ground down below.

The firing-party was already there, with a young officer in command.

"Here he comes!"

The murmur rose from the crowd in exactly the same way as it had done a few nights ago, when Lorendana the dancer stepped on the stage of the Pavillon Solferino. The audience had then sighed: "Here she comes!" welcoming the beautiful performer, holding its breath with the sheer excitement of anticipated pleasure and delight in the coming spectacle. And now, up went the same murmur: "Here he comes!"

Those who were in the rear of the crowd craned their necks; there was a lot of pushing and jostling to get a better view. One woman—it was said afterwards that she was the wife of one of the Emperor's equerries—was nearly pushed off the wall, down into the Fosse. That would indeed have been a strange catastrophe. It created a great deal of hilarity, and a good many people were actually laughing and making ribald jokes at the very moment when the condemned man and his escort came out by the heavy iron-bound prison gate.

Pierre du Pont-Croix walked with a firm step, head erect, eyes fixed as it were inwardly. He did not seem to see the crowd or to hear the groans of execration or pity which greeted his appearance on the scene. He walked to his appointed place, faced the firing-party and refused the handkerchief wherewith the sergeant offered to bandage his eyes.

It was all over in a moment. The roll of drums, the word of command, the volley, and what had been Pierre du Pont-Croix was just an inert mass lying in the mud of the Fosse de la Part-Dieu. The spectacle was over. The crowd dispersed. Back they went to their work and their play. A man had died in the flower of his youth; but what was that to them? In their fathers' days, not so many years ago, the death of men, of women and even of children had been a daily spectacle, in Lyons as in Paris. Life was a very cheap thing still; men had not yet learned to look upon it as a sacred gift from God not lightly to be taken away.

Two men lingered on the fringe of the crowd: de Neuvic and Gérard de Lanoy. They waited until the black flag was hoisted up on the tower of la Part-Dieu and fluttered in the morning breeze by the side of the tricolour: it was the official signal that a traitor had paid the penalty of his crime. The two young men made the sign of the cross and murmured a prayer for the repose of the soul of their friend. Then de Neuvic said:

"Come, Gérard. There's nothing we can do now."

None of them had been allowed to see Pierre after his arrest. The trial, such as it was, was conducted in *camera*. There were no witnesses to be heard and the indictment was brief. After sentence was passed the traitor was allowed a few brief hours in which to repent of his crime and commend his sinful soul to God. That was all. For three days and the whole of the previous night Gérard had stood by the prison gates waiting for news. Neither bribery nor cajolery was of any avail. No one was allowed to visit the prisoner. Less than an hour ago he extracted the news from a kindly police officer that the execution was eventually fixed for six o'clock. De Neuvic, whose portly body held wells of good feeling and sympathy, sought him near la Part-Dieu, knowing that he would find him there. When it was all over he tried to get his friend away.

"Come, Gérard!" he reiterated.

But de Lanoy would not leave the place yet.

"You go, François," he said; "I'll join you presently, I promise," he added with a faint smile, seeing that de Neuvic looked anxiously at him. The two friends held one another by the hand for a second or two, after which de Neuvic went his way.

Gérard waited till his friend was out of sight, then he went close up to the low wall. Pierre—all that was left of Pierre was still lying there. The firing-party had gone, so had the officer. The priest had finished his orisons and gone away too. Pierre lay there stretched out, face downwards, all alone. So still! So

pathetic! Gérard looked down on him for a time, dry-eyed and with aching heart. Then he thrust his hand into the inner pocket of his coat and drew out a sprig of rosemary.

Under his breath he murmured: "For remembrance, Pierre!" and was on the point of throwing the sprig down into the Fosse when a hand in a black glove took hold of his wrist.

CHAPTER 8

The hand in the black glove was that of a woman. The young man's eyes wandered from the hand up the arm, where the glove was met by the short puffed sleeve of a black gown. The other hand was now stretched out and took the sprig of rosemary from him. He looked up at the face. It was the dancer, Lorendana. She wore the same little modish bonnet she had on that other night, but with a veil this time which fell from its brim down to her throat, hiding that egregiously dyed hair, and even toning down the scarlet of her lips. Round her shoulders she had a soft kind of shawl with a fringe; her gown was black with small white dots all over it.

De Lanoy took in her whole appearance at a glance, then looked up into her face again: through the thin veil he saw that her eyes rested compassionately on him. She held the sprig of rosemary for a moment or two in her hand, then dropped it into the Fosse. It fell on the lifeless body of Pierre du Pont-Croix.

"Why did you do that?" Gérard remonstrated in a low, constrained voice.

"Better I should, than you," she murmured in reply.

"Why?" he asked.

"There are eyes and ears. And many know that he was your friend."

"The best friend man ever had," Gérard declared with ill-concealed emotion.

"Perhaps," she rejoined enigmatically.

Then as he made no comment, but remained quite still looking down into the Fosse as if to bid a last farewell to his friend, she added:

"Shall we go now?"

He looked up quickly, like a man suddenly awakened from a dream. She was moving away, but turned to him and insisted:

"Won't you come?"

"Where?" he asked.

"16, Rue Grenelle," she said, smiling. "I told you. You want a rest, don't you?"

"I don't think so. I am not tired. And I have promised——"

"To meet your friends," she broke in. "I wouldn't if I were you."

"Why not?" he retorted.

"It would be better for you if you could keep away for a time . . . Why not go abroad?"

Gérard made no immediate answer. He tried to read the expression of her eyes, but could not because of the veil. He was conscious of a strange feeling just then, as if he himself had become unreal, de-materialised: the creation of a dream. And she too, Lorendana. She looked like a ghost, all dressed in black, and with those tiny white dots all over her gown, which danced before his eyes. What moved him Gérard did not know. He was still acting as in a dream. What he did do was to take hold of the girl's veil and to throw its ends over the brim of her bonnet, revealing her face and the mystery of its expression.

He studied it for a moment or two. It certainly was a beautiful face, delicate in outline with that tiny chin and the wide brow. But oh! how he hated that horrible dyed hair, and the vivid scarlet of her lips. He longed to ask her why she disfigured herself so: but the expression of her face intrigued him: her eyes were full of pity, and yet there was a smile round her mouth, a smile that was rendered arch by that fascinating mole just above her upper lip.

"You know something," he said abruptly; "what is it?"

Then as she made no reply, but still looked both pitiful and arch, he insisted peremptorily:

"Why don't you say what it is?"

"There is nothing," she said at last, "it is only common sense . . ."

"What is?"

"That you must go away."

She gave a quick glance in the direction of the Fosse and then back to him. "He was your friend," she added.

Gérard gave a light shrug and sighed:

"But I knew nothing of his plans—he said nothing to me . . ."

"And there's his sister," she rejoined, "don't forget."

"Cécile!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes! Cécile!"

Gérard turned on her with wrath in his eyes. Somehow, it had angered him to hear the girl's name spoken by those scarlet lips.

"You dare . . ." he began. It was as near to an insult as he had ever uttered to a woman in his life, and suddenly he paused, ashamed. But she only gave a slight shrug and the smile never left her lips.

"I must not speak the name?" she asked coolly. "Well! it was in her interest and yours. Good-bye!"

And before Gérard had recovered his temper sufficiently to murmur an apology, she had already turned and walked away rapidly down the street. Gérard watched her retreating figure tripping along on high-heeled shoes, graceful despite the egregious fashion of the time, and wearing the ridiculous crinoline with an air of dignity. He watched her crossing the road and picking her steps daintily over the gutter. She never once looked back. By the time she disappeared round the angle of the street, Gérard was wishing that he had stopped her from going, that he had at any rate detained her until she had given him some explanation of her enigmatic utterances. What was she driving at? Did she mean to utter a warning? But if so, by what right? What did she know? and how did she come to know him and his friendship for Pierre? How did she come to mention Cécile? And suddenly he caught his breath, so dazzling was the light which all in a moment had broken on the confusion of his thoughts. She knew so much because it was her business to know. She, Lorendana the dancer of the meaningless name, the dyed hair and rouged lips, was one of Toulon's spies! Everyone knew that he employed women as well as men to do his dirty work for him: women out of the gutter and the slums, willing to carry on that abominable trade for the sake of its remuneration.

The thought soon turned into certainty, and Gérard's first sensation as soon as this certainty forced itself upon his mind was one of physical nausea—then of intense bitterness and rage. But for the place where he stood, with Pierre still lying down there in the Fosse, so near him, he would have laughed aloud. Lorendana the divine! for whom the sober de Neuvic had declared himself ready to commit a crime, and de Méricourt to squander a fortune, Lorendana, a common spy! What a story to relate to those enthusiasts who had shouted themselves hoarse in their expressions of fulsome flattery! Gérard's thoughts flew back to that tragic night when, after leaving the Pavillon, he had gone round to the

stage-door, and seen Lorendana in the company of a down-at-heel Italian—another of Toulon's mouchards probably. How dirty it all was! how low! how unspeakably vulgar! Pierre, poor old Pierre! was well out of it all. His noble soul had revolted against this regime of upstarts, that could only maintain itself by such abominable expedients.

And slowly it dawned upon Gérard de Lanoy that perhaps the tragedy down there in the Fosse de la Part-Dieu was Lorendana's work: that it was she who had spied on Pierre and betrayed him to the *Cabinet Secret*. That thought was well-nigh intolerable; but there was so much that pointed in that direction: her knowledge of Pierre, her mention of Cécile, the deliberate way in which she had attracted his, Gérard's, attention by throwing a flower in his face and then had tried to lure him into an assignation, so that she might worm more of Pierre's secrets out of him!

Certainty! Certainty! It was a certainty! Pierre, his friend, the best friend man ever had, had been the victim of Lorendana's foul trade. An unreasoning rage, akin to madness, obscured Gérard's brain now and blurred his eyesight. There is no doubt that if the girl had still been there, he would have seized her by the throat and squeezed the truth out of her scarlet lips. For a few seconds longer he stood quite still, trying to collect his thoughts. He looked down into the Fosse. Pierre was no longer lying there: a couple of men, stolid and indifferent, were bearing his body away; the next moment they disappeared behind the heavy prison gates; they and the body of the best, the most loyal friend man ever had.

Gérard strove with all his might to regain some outward semblance of calm. Thank Heaven he knew where to find that abominable spy! 16, Rue Grenelle. She herself had suggested the assignation. Well! she should have her wish.

A passer-by came along. Gérard raised his hat.

"Pardon, Monsieur! the Rue Grenelle?"

"On the rive gauche, Monsieur," was the answer, "over the next bridge, then to your right. Anyone will direct you further."

"Merci, Monsieur."

CHAPTER

9

"Poor old Gérard!" the Duchesse sighed, speaking about the events of that morning. "He told me himself that he was like a madman just then. He did not really know what he was doing. He just ran on and on, over the bridge to the rive gauche, where was situated the Rue Grenelle. Whether his wild look, his undue haste, attracted the attention of the passers-by, he neither knew nor cared. Pierre had been spied upon by one of Toulon's mouchards, and Gérard had made up his mind that that mouchard was the dancer Lorendana. "I suppose," the dear old lady added with a gentle shrug of her pretty shoulders, "that he was already in love with her. Poor little Cécile! She never had much chance with him. She was pretty and a lady; but insipid! And you know —Gérard—well!—he had already had so many *aventures d'amour* in his day, he wanted something more piquant, something that at first sight would appear unattainable. The fact that this Lorendana was just a girl from the people and that he would have to enter the lists for her favours with practically the whole of the *jeunesse dorée,* stimulated him into a *grande passion.* Whereas poor little Cécile—well! she was just a young, fresh fruit ready to fall into his hands for the asking."

Gérard, it seems, was a long time finding the Rue Grenelle, which was a narrow street at the side of the new railway station. Quite a number of passers-by whom he asked to direct him had never heard of the Rue Grenelle. The delay, as well as the aimless walking to and fro in search of the place, only helped to exacerbate his nerves. And it had turned very hot. The sun was scorching, and the streets in this unfashionable quarter were dusty and evil-smelling. Though he didn't know it at the time, Gérard was very tired. He had had very little sleep for the past three nights while Pierre's fate hung in the balance, and last night none at all.

"Pardon, Monsieur; la Rue Grenelle?"

"I don't know, Monsieur. I am a stranger in these parts."

A mutual, polite bow and Gérard left standing at the corner of the street, vaguely wondering whom to ask next.

"Pardon, Monsieur; Rue Grenelle?"

"But here, Monsieur. You are in the Rue Grenelle."

Whereupon Gérard forgot his manners: never said "thank you," but raced up the long, narrow street till he found No. 16.

He shouted the girl's name to the concierge, who was having his lunch in the bosom of his family.

"No. 3 staircase," the man shouted in response, with his mouth full. "Top floor. Door on your left."

No. 3 was a back staircase and gave access on the courtyard. It was narrow, dark and smelt of food and drains; but Gérard noticed nothing of that. He ran helter-skelter up the stone steps, and arrived breathless on the top floor, opposite the door on the left of the landing. A soiled and crumpled card was fastened to the door with a drawing-pin; her name was on it, "Juanita Lorendana." Gérard pulled the bell. After a moment or two there was a patter of feet. Then the door was opened. A pretty girl in a neat dark skirt, with a fichu daintily folded over her breast, and a pretty white cap to cover her hair, murmured: "Monsieur?"

"Madame Lorendana?" Gérard asked, a little surprised at the trim appearance of the girl.

"C'est ici, Monsieur," she replied. "What does Monsieur desire?"

"Obviously to speak with Madame," Gérard answered curtly.

"I will see if Madame will receive Monsieur," the girl said primly. "Madame is at lunch at the moment. What name shall I say?"

Gérard would probably have felt irritated by all this fuss—"A common dancer, I ask you," he would have said, if one of his friends had been with him—had he not been so completely taken by surprise. As it was, and without showing any impatience, he fumbled inside his coat for his pocket-book, took out a card and handed it to the girl. She glanced down on it, and seemed impressed by the name and title of the visitor: le Vicomte Gérard de Lanoy. She opened the door wider and stood aside, allowing Gérard to pass through.

"Will Monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?" she said in her prim, ceremonious way. "I will tell Madame."

Gérard stepped into the small, square hall, and the girl disappeared through a glass door at the end. The young man was distinctly astonished. So astonished, that some of his impatience and unreasoning rage fell away from him. Of course heat and fatigue had already told on him, even before he entered this cool, sweet-smelling apartment where a certain atmosphere of femininity and daintiness at once gave him a sense of peace and well-being.

It seemed like stepping into another world, after the unpleasant smells, the glare, the dust of this slummy part of the town. No wonder he was amazed.

When he rang the bell, he had expected to see some slatternly old harridan of the usual type of *bonne-à-tout-faire,* guarding her mistress's door—or perhaps her daughter's—like a dragon against all comers. Instead of that, there was that prim, dainty wench, with the neat cap and fichu, obviously well drilled in the manners and customs of good-class servants. Gérard looked about him with ever-growing curiosity. The hall was small, with the glass door opposite the entrance, and a passage going off on the left. There was a nice piece of Oriental carpet on the tiled floor, and in the centre a round table of rare bird's-eye maple, in the middle of which stood a bronze lamp which diffused the sweet, aromatic scent that had already tickled Gérard's fastidious nostrils so pleasantly.

Before he had time to take in anything more of his surroundings, the girl came tripping back, and holding open the glass door she said in her usual prim way:

"Will Monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?"

She took his hat and stick from him as he passed through into one of the daintiest boudoirs it had ever been his privilege to enter. Everything in it proclaimed a refined and delicate taste: the Aubusson carpet on the floor, the dainty lace curtains that masked the windows, the Bartolozzi engravings on the panelled walls, the Louis XV bergères, the Sèvres china! Astonishment in Gérard did indeed turn to amazement. He felt as if he were living through one of the fairy-tales of his childhood: as if like Aladdin he had walked into a magic cave, and seen the treasures of the Orient spread out before his gaze.

But what was more marvellous than anything he had seen before was the entrance of the queen of this fairy-like abode. While he, Gérard, had been sweating with rage and running in search of the Rue Grenelle, Lorendana had changed her black dress with the white dots, for a thing of white muslin and lace flounces and blue ribbons which cascaded and billowed round her, over her crinoline, making her look like an exquisite piece of china come to give life to this enchanted palace.

"It was at once obvious to poor Gérard," the Duchesse herself admitted, "that he could not vent his rage on that fairy-like creature. It would have been a positive sin," she added quaintly, "to have creased or torn that beautiful creation of muslin and lace. I suppose the girl had prepared the whole *mise en scène*; as far

as her personal appearance was concerned, she was clever enough, mind you, to have foreseen this visit from Gérard and the mood in which he meant to appear before her. Of course I never saw that apartment of hers, which he always described as a fairy-palace. No doubt he exaggerated its beauty. One can't imagine Aubusson carpets and Bartolozzi engravings on the top floor of an old house in the slums of Lyons: still! I suppose the place was so different from what poor Gérard expected to find, that he saw it in a more golden light than it was in reality."

It seems intolerably certain then, since Gérard de Lanoy did himself admit it, that Lorendana appeared before him looking so ethereal and so delicate that all the horrible suspicions which he had of her, and which had haunted him like hideous ghouls that were driving him mad, suddenly receded from him. Not that he became entirely free from them! but they were swept into the background of his mind—for the first minute or two that she stood, silent, before him—by the one clear thought that his friends were quite right: she was divine. How could he ever have denied it? She was divine, not only in herself, but in the atmosphere which she created about her. No wonder that blasé men of the world like de Neuvic or Méricourt fell to her charm and to her mystery.

After a moment or two she came forward, extended one of those exquisite hands of hers to Gérard and said simply:

"I waited lunch for you, until a quarter of an hour ago. I knew you would come."

Gérard, according to his own showing, felt an egregious fool. He had never felt so tongue-tied in his life. All he could do was to murmur something about the Rue Grenelle not being easy to find. He had taken her hand and kissed it ceremoniously: and was still holding it when she withdrew it very gently.

"If you haven't lunched," she said lightly, "won't you join me? Your place is still laid."

Without waiting for his acquiescence, she led the way into another room, where a round table was laid with fine napery, silver, glass, china, such as would have done honour to the table of a princess: and before Gérard recovered a measure of consciousness he found himself sitting beside her, mute, like an automaton, feeling that he had no real control over his actions or any of his senses. Certain it was that he sat there gazing on her and never uttering a word, until she said:

"I hope you are hungry. There are 'truites au bleu'; a chicken from Bresse, and a 'glace pralinée,' and we'll have a bottle of

vin rosé from the Vallée du Rhone, which I think you will like. It is nicer at this time of day than champagne, don't you agree?"

* * * * *

The next hour or so always remained a blank in Gérard de Lanoy's memory. He ate an excellent lunch, which was admirably served, he drank the delicious vin rosé poured out for him by Lorendana's exquisite hands. He talked a little, but for the most part he listened to her soft, well-modulated voice. She was a good talker—this dancer, or spy, or whatever she was. She had read a great deal, and seen all there was to see: theatres, ballets, operas, the Salon. Had M. de Lanoy heard M. Gounod's latest opera? *Roméo et Juliette*. Lovely music, but would never be, she thought, so popular as *Faust*. Had he read Octave Feuillet's *Monsieur de Camors*? It was being much discussed. Not for *la jeune fille*, of course, which was strange in a book by that chaste novelist. And what did he think of that new author, M. Emile Zola, who was certainly creating a sensation in the literary world, with his realism which many put down to an innately coarse mind, but which she believed to be just a girding against the shackles of artificial fiction-writing which had been prevalent far too long?

At one time Gérard asked her how she came to reside in such a dusty street, when obviously her taste lay in the direction of beautiful things. He tried to tell her, without causing her offence, how astonished he had been to find such a fairy palace in so squalid a house.

"You came to see me," she said in reply, "not the street I live in."

"But you could have your beautiful apartment," he argued, "in a less objectionable neighbourhood."

"*Le bon Dieu*," she said with her quaint smile, "might have put a walnut in something less messy than that green outer shell which leaves such indelible stains on one's fingers."

"But——"

"Have you noticed my Corot," she broke in abruptly, "over the bergère in the boudoir? I had the great luck to buy it direct from the artist."

Obviously she did not wish the subject to be discussed any further, and it would have been bad taste to disobey. She rose and led the way back into the boudoir, where hung the Corot, which he duly admired, though, of a truth, his eyes saw little else by this time except her beauty.

While she dispensed coffee she discussed some of M. Haussman's

latest vandalism. "It is vandalism," she declared, "to pull down that beautiful old house in the Rue des Gobelins. Boulevards were all very well, but le vieux Paris was a tradition, a monument that belonged to the whole civilised world." All this she said very glibly, and comments and criticisms poured in well-chosen words from her scarlet lips.

For her lips were still scarlet, and her hair still jet-black. Gérard, who at every moment was falling deeper and deeper still in love, had at first been hardly conscious of these disfigurements. That dyed hair and those vivid lips had, in his mind, become so essentially the attribute of this divinely beautiful woman, that he had ceased to think of them as marring her loveliness. But there came a time when conversation began to flag a little, when that delicious drowsiness which comes after an enjoyable meal began to weigh Gérard's lids down. Remember, he had had little if any sleep for three days, and that during that time his nerves had been constantly on the rack, thinking of Pierre, moving heaven and earth and officials to obtain a sight of his friend. Mme. de Lanoy would have it, too, that Lorendana used a subtle perfume in the room, which had the effect of numbing the senses of those whom she wished to drag into her toils.

"And nothing will put it out of my head," she always declared, "that Juanita Lorendana had not already then made up her mind to enmesh my poor Gérard."

Gérard himself never knew that he actually fell asleep at one moment. "Impossible," he often averred, "that I should have slept while her voice ran like music in my ear, and I could look on that delicious mole just above her upper lip and try to fathom the mystery that lurked behind her eyes." Nevertheless, he was bound to admit that he was quite unaware of the passage of time, and that there did come a moment when he slid from a state of contemplation into one of dreaming.

CHAPTER 10

And from this state Gérard de Lanoy woke abruptly, as dreamers often do. A clock was striking. He counted the beats. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. It was six o'clock. Hours and hours had

gone by since he had entered the fairy palace, since he had rushed away like a madman from the Fosse where lay the lifeless body of his friend, in order to demand justice of the spy who had compassed his death. Waking from his dream state, he found himself lying on a couch, with pillows under his head. Useless to argue that he had never been asleep: how else could he find himself lying on a couch, when the last thing that he remembered distinctly was sitting straight up, looking, listening and holding his breath lest the vision which enchanted his senses vanished before his gaze.

At the moment he thought that he was dreaming, or else under some sort of spell. His limbs refused him service, and he just lay there on the couch like a log, motionless and silent, hardly daring to breathe, only letting his gaze wander around his narrow circle of vision. After a time he became conscious of a persistent sound, which at first he could not define, but which he presently distinguished as the scratching of a pen. He raised his head, and saw the back of Lorendana, her lace-trimmed polonaise, her billowing skirt, and that egregious jet-black hair which he so hated. She was sitting busily writing at an open desk.

In raising himself he must have made a slight noise, for she gave a quick glance over her shoulder, then very hastily she put down her pen, gathered up a number of papers, which lay scattered in front of her, and thrust them into a drawer. She was in the act of closing the desk when Gérard seized her by the wrist. At sight of her sitting there writing busily, then obviously scared the moment he moved, all his suspicions rushed back into his mind like an avalanche. The dream vanished as suddenly as it had come. In a moment he was on his feet and by the side of her, clutching her wrist with one hand and with the other pointing to the quill pen which her fingers had let fall. He could hardly see her for the mist which was between her and his eyes. He knew now what it meant to "see red," for the mist was crimson, and he saw her vaguely through it, and she seemed the embodiment of what he hated most in the world, something that he would presently sweep off the face of the earth into the abyss, where rotted all that had been most despicable and most vile and on whom justice had already been done.

She was no longer the fairy creature now, the delicate bit of china, whom it were a sin to touch, lest it break. She was just the spy, the mouchard, the horrible, sneaking, lying spy who had plied her filthy trade with such success that Pierre now lay, an inert mass, in the Fosse de la Part-Dieu. He hated her for what

she had done to Pierre, but hated her ten thousand times worse for what she had done to him: cajoled him and lured him and lied to him, lied till he was on the point of forgetting his vengeance, and his loyalty to his dead friend. He hoped vaguely that she would read in his eyes all the contempt and the hatred that he felt for her, and that seeing this, she would be satisfied, realising that this would be the end of all things, that never again would she stand and smile and make a fool of men with her play of eyes and her scarlet lips; make a fool of them the better to send them to their death—realising, too, that she was standing at last before a justiciary, who would demand a life for a life, her blood for that of his friend.

But, as a matter of fact, Lorendana did not seem terrified in the least. She rose and tried to disengage her wrist, and when she found she couldn't do this, she said quite coolly:

"M. de Lanoy, you are hurting me."

He laughed. It struck him as so funny, that she should complain of the hurt on her wrist, when presently he would have her by the throat and she would feel her life ebbing away and the shadow of death descending upon her.

"What were you writing just now?" he asked abruptly.

She shrugged. She smiled. She replied still coolly:

"Nothing that can interest you."

And once more she tried to free her wrist.

"M. de Lanoy," she went on simply, "please! You really are hurting me."

"You are going to show me what you have been writing," he commanded. "What was it? What have I said that you must report to your paymaster, M. Toulon? Something that will send me the same way as my friend Pierre du Pont-Croix? What?"

Again she shrugged. And again she smiled.

"Now you are talking nonsense," she said.

"Don't lie to me," he retorted, trying to keep a hold on himself. "Whatever you do, don't lie. You see I know . . . everything. . . . I guessed . . . the moment you said something about Cécile. . . . I guessed at once . . ."

"What?"

"That it was you."

Up went her pretty shoulders once more, while that provoking smile still lingered round her scarlet lips.

"Now you are talking in riddles," she said.

"It was you who spied on Pierre, and who gave him away so that . . . It was you," he insisted; "own to it. Don't lie."

He was trying so hard to keep cool, for he had meant to come here as a judge, not as a mad seeker after revenge. He wanted to extract a confession from her first, and then soberly, calmly, to pass sentence of death on her for what she had done to Pierre. Judge and executioner he wished to be, but impartial and unemotional. He still felt that he had himself in hand, but his temper was straining at the leash. There was that smile, gentle and pitying, the absence of fear in those unfathomable eyes, the play of the eyelids, that tantalising mole above the upper lip, there were a hundred other things about her, subtle and undefinable, which sent the blood rushing up to his head and raised the crimson mist before his eyes.

"It was you," he reiterated. "In God's name, don't lie!"

But all she did was to shake her pretty head quite slowly.

"I am not lying," she said. "I had nothing to do with your friend Pierre."

Then it was that he let go of her wrist, and turned to the desk. He bent down to it and feverishly tore open one of the drawers. There were a few letters in it and two or three photographs. Gérard picked up one letter and then another, tried to read a few lines, glanced at the photographs and one by one, with hands hot and shaky, he scattered them about the floor. He opened another drawer, and then another: there were household accounts in one, cooking recipes in another: all neatly docketed and tied together. A few more letters there were, but they meant nothing, at least nothing that he could understand, also some scraps of manuscript music, and half-finished bits of verse, but nothing that looked at all like a letter or report with the ink still wet on it, and hastily thrust out of sight. Obviously the desk had a secret drawer; but it was solid and did not give up its secret. The vain search, as well as the consciousness of being baffled, enraged Gérard beyond endurance. His temples were throbbing, his mood now was akin to frenzy. He bruised his fists against the stout wood of the desk; his breath came hot and panting through his parched throat. And all this, while Lorendana stood by, silent and cool in her white muslin and her laces, looking down on him with that aggravating air of gentle pity, and—yes!—amusement.

And slowly the consciousness came to Gérard that he was acting like a fool. An unutterable fool! A madman! If he had found that unfinished letter, and if it did confirm his suspicions, what then? From the first his suspicions were a certainty: he needed no other confirmation. But he had behaved like a madman and a coward. He had allowed blind rage to master him. He was no

longer an impartial judge, and he knew now that he never would be an executioner. The moment had gone by when he could have seized her by the throat, and extracted a life for a life, the betrayer's blood for the betrayed. A few seconds and it would all have been over, if only he could have held his frenzy in check. Pierre, his friend, would have been avenged, if blind rage had not mastered him. He had allowed the moment to slip by, and now he was just a fool venting his rage on insensate things, while she stood by, pitying and amused.

He was overwhelmingly ashamed.

CHAPTER 11

"Poor old Gérard," the Duchesse sighed, and I saw the tears gather in her eyes, as they so often did when she spoke of him, "his state of mind must have been terrible that evening. I didn't see him the whole of that day, though I sent round once or twice to his lodgings to ask him to come. I kept Cécile by me all this time. Poor child! I was dreadfully sorry for her. She had been devoted to Pierre. What I didn't like about her, was that she never cried once: from the moment that he was arrested she remained strangely self-centred and dry-eyed. I was sure that she had something on her mind, for she sat by the hour staring straight out before her, and at the slightest sound she would start, and the expression in her face then was heart-rending. It was so like terror. But not ordinary terror: something more than that, which I could not define. I tried to question her, very discreetly, and as a rule she had great confidence in me. I knew all her little secrets, and most of Pierre's, but now there was something which I could not get out of her. Of course I did not try to force her confidence. I sent for our family doctor and got him to give her a soothing draught, hoping for better things the next day. But you may imagine what I felt with those two young things—Gérard and Cécile—whom I loved as I would have loved my own children if I had been blessed with any, both in a state of mind not very far removed from madness."

I imagine that as far as her brother-in-law was concerned, the old lady was right. His state of mind was akin to madness. He

had rushed away from the Rue Grenelle without another look at the woman who, he was convinced, had betrayed his friend, and fooled him into foregoing the act of justice on which he had so firmly set his mind. But he also rushed away with the full consciousness that she was the only woman in the world for him, and that his love for her, born God alone knew when or how or why, would last until his heart had ceased to beat.

He rushed away conscious that if he stayed but a minute longer he would take her in his arms and forget friendship, loyalty, honour in a moment of supreme ecstasy. Fool! fool that he was!

He spent the rest of the evening wandering aimlessly about the streets. It was late when he finally went home to his lodgings. His *valet-de-chambre* told him that Mme. la Duchesse de Lanoy had sent her man over twice to inquire after M. le Vicomte, and to ask if M. le Vicomte would go over to see Mme. la Duchesse before he retired for the night.

It was too late, however, to obey his sister-in-law's summons that evening. Gérard, thankful in a way that this was so—for he had an overwhelming desire to be alone—sent word round to Mme. la Duchesse thanking her for her solicitude, and adding that he would surely wait on her the next day before noon.

The Marquis de Ravenne, who was one of the great notabilities of Lyons, had placed his house at the disposal of M. le Duc de Lanoy, Grand Marshal of the Emperor. The dear old lady often said that when *ce cher* Gérard came to see her there the next day he looked positively ghastly: his eyes were hollow and circled with purple, and there was not a drop of blood seemingly in his cheeks or his lips. But she was discretion itself: such a real *grande dame*! and at the same time such a true woman. She asked no questions and only referred—very tactfully, of course—to the sad fate of Pierre in order to let Gérard know how deeply she sympathised, and how thoroughly she understood.

Cécile du Pont-Croix was still with her, and frankly the Duchesse hoped that the two young people whom she loved so dearly would find in one another's company sweet solace for their sorrow. Of course, in those days it was not considered right in the upper strata of society ever to allow young people of opposite sexes to be left alone together. A chaperon was always supposed to be on the spot—for what purpose or reason no sane person was ever able to discover. Anyway that was the rule, and even in those days when she was still young herself there was no greater stickler for *bon ton* or etiquette than Madame la Duchesse de Lanoy. But she had such a big heart and such understanding of human nature,

its virtues and its foibles, that she was always ready to relax her principles if by so doing she could further the happiness of someone she cared for. In this case she had made up her mind that Gérard's happiness as well as Cécile's lay in joining hands over a common sorrow: in weeping a good deal, then smiling wanly and lastly falling into one another's arms.

So, after Gérard had paid his respects to her, and Cécile had almost smiled when she greeted him, she carried on a little desultory conversation with the young people for a time, then cleverly turned the subject to a book which she had just been reading, and which she very much wished to lend to Gérard. Whereupon she rose and declared her intention to fetch the book at once. No, she insisted, no one could get it but herself. No one would know where to find it. And she tripped off on her high-heeled shoes, leaving the children, as she always called them, alone.

* * * * *

The Duchesse always spoke of Cécile du Pont-Croix—quite good-naturedly, of course, for she was very fond of her—as insipid. Perhaps she was, though in those days it was very difficult for a *jeune fille* in good society to be anything else. Always under the eye of a chaperon, she never had a chance of letting herself go. Timidity was considered a virtue—the reverse was counted immodest. There were so few subjects that were thought fit to be discussed in front of her; so few books that she was allowed to read, so few plays which she was allowed to see. *Les jeunes filles* were not supposed to have opinions of their own either on politics, or art, or literature: they knew too little to form such opinions and were too timid to express them, if by chance they had thought things out for themselves.

In that way certainly Cécile du Pont-Croix was insipid, but certainly not more so than most of her contemporaries who belonged to the same world as herself. But in the Seligman collection of miniatures recently sold at the Hôtel Drouot, there was one of her painted in the early '60's by Jeanne Herbelin: a real gem, showing her as anything but insipid, though rather sorrowful already in spite of her extreme youth, as if the sorrows which she was destined to endure had already cast their shadow over her. She had a quantity of soft brown hair, and large dark eyes that always had an expression of wonder in them, as if the whole world perpetually astonished her with its cruelty and its callousness. At least, that is how her face struck me in the miniature.

At the moment that Mme. de Lanoy went out of the room and

left her alone with Gérard she looked extraordinarily young and extraordinarily pathetic in deep black, with her brown hair parted in the middle, and waved softly over her ears, and two long curls resting on her left shoulder. She was still dry-eyed, but the expression of her face was one of extreme dejection, and the glance which she suddenly threw on Gérard was undoubtedly one of terror. He was at once smitten with remorse. All these hours while she mourned a brother whom she had idolised, he had never once thought of her, never attempted to see her or tried to comfort her. He had been engrossed in his own sorrow and in his desire to avenge Pierre, and to unmask the vile *mouchard* who had betrayed him. Even now, when he came very reluctantly to obey his sister-in-law's summons, he had only thought of the annoyance it caused him; his only longing was to be let alone: his only hope that the face of Lorendana, her eyes, her smile would cease to haunt him and leave him in peace: he had never once thought of Cécile.

But now when she sat there, looking so forlorn and dejected, the pathos of her, the look of sorrow and terror in her eyes aroused all the affection which Gérard had never ceased to feel for her. They had been children together. Playmates in the great château and the vast park belonging to Gérard's brother, the Duc de Lanoy. The Duchesse, though still quite young at the time, had mothered Cécile ever since Mme. du Pont-Croix's tragic death. Ties of tradition, of family, of mutual childish joys and sorrows bound these two together, even though the stronger chain of passionate love had only been forged on the girl's side—never on his. Gérard was no fool, and he was not a fop, but he could not help knowing that Cécile loved him. Because of that, and his own lack of passion, he felt all the more ashamed now of his callousness and all the more desperately sorry for her.

He was never a man given to many words, and certainly at the present moment he was quite unable to express in words exactly what he felt, so he waited for a few seconds until Cécile raised her eyes to him once more, whereupon he rose, went over to her, and knelt down beside her chair. Had the Duchesse come in just then she would have been happy to see the pretty picture which these two made, and would surely have imagined that Gérard had at last made up his mind to make love to Cécile in real earnest. But all that Gérard did was to take hold of the girl's hands and to murmur her name very softly, almost imploringly:

"Cécile!"

She turned fully to him. Anyone could have seen then that she had something on her mind. Her dark eyes expressed so many

things, such conflicting emotions. Terror certainly, but also appeal, trust, puzzlement. Gérard did not know what to think. He tried to fathom the thoughts which underlay this extraordinary expression of the eyes.

"What is it, Cécile dear?" he said softly. "Is there anything I can do?"

She was so obviously fighting with herself. Fighting over something. Emotion pulling one way, a curious kind of fright another. At one moment she sighed and turned her head away. She even tried to rise and get away, but Gérard held her fast, one hand on her hands, his arm round her shoulders.

"You know you can trust me, Cécile," he went on earnestly. "You always trusted me, when we were little, and you were afraid of getting scolded. You remember when you lost your shoe in the stream and you didn't dare tell. You thought you'd get a whipping that time—it was forbidden to wade in the water—what a lovely lie we concocted, didn't we?—and it was I who got the whipping but I didn't care . . ."

Gérard went on talking softly, lightly in the same strain, in an endeavour to soothe the girl's nerves, which were evidently on the stretch, and to gain her confidence. There was something. Whatever could it be? Of course he would get it out of her presently, but she was strangely reticent this time. Cécile had always been such a happy child, and inclined to be expansive—never secretive. The tragic death of Pierre could not have changed her character so completely, all of a sudden.

At last he put the main question to her:

"Cécile dear, is it anything to do with Pierre?"

She sighed again and again, turned her head away, and then she nodded.

"What is it? Shall I try to guess?"

It would have been difficult to guess, for he had no clue whatever. He could not even remotely imagine what there was in the girl's mind in connection with Pierre—beyond sorrow, of course. But why terror and the strange look of appeal which she turned on him from time to time? Fortunately the Duchesse was still trying to find that book; but time was getting on, she might be back at any moment, and somehow Gérard had the feeling that Cécile would then retire into her shell once more and never speak another word.

Suddenly he had an inspiration.

"Cécile dear," he asked abruptly, "did they let you see Pierre when—when he was in prison?"

"No," she replied.

"Did you," he insisted, "see him that evening, just before . . . ?"

She nodded: "Yes."

Gérard gave a deep sigh of satisfaction. Here was a clue at last. A beginning of confidence. Something in the girl's attitude had relaxed all of a sudden. She was still fighting with herself, but emotion was winning the fight; terror no longer had the upper hand.

"You know," he went on after a little while, taking hold of her hand and fondling it, "that he came with us, de Neuvic, Méricourt and the others, to the Pavillon Solferino, on purpose to see a dancer in whom we were all interested."

"Yes, I know," she replied.

"Well, he left us rather abruptly. We none of us could understand why he went away and left us, but anyway he went—And," Gérard added softly, "the next time I saw him was at the window of a house in the Rue de l'Aigle. The Emperor was about to drive past and Pierre had a pistol in his hand."

"I didn't know," Cécile murmured, "that you saw him then."

"I just happened to be passing by. Imagine what I felt. I could see him, but there was the crowd, and at that very moment the mounted guard went thundering by. The next thing I saw was Pierre raise his hand to fire, and a hand stretched out from the dark behind him; then the shot went off."

"I didn't know you had seen all that," the girl said, her dark eyes fixed upon his face.

Gérard waited a moment or two in silence, then he asked her:

"Where were you, Cécile, while this was going on?"

"At home," she replied.

"You had seen Pierre?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"He came in from the Pavillon. I didn't go, you know, though Fanny would have taken me—but I had a headache. Pierre came in—it was about ten o'clock—I think he must have come to fetch the pistol. He kissed me and asked me how I was—then he went to his room. Half an hour afterwards he came back. He had a small parcel in his hand . . ."

She paused. Once again she appeared frightened to speak. Gérard had drawn a low stool beside her chair. He sat there holding her hands; his eyes were fixed on her face with a concentrated glance into which he tried to show all the tenderness, the affection and the sympathy which he felt for her. She could not help but

respond to it all. The expression of her face softened a little and tears—the first she had shed since that awful evening—began to gather in her eyes. She disengaged one of her hands, and with it dived into the pocket of her voluminous skirt. From it she drew a small parcel, hardly more bulky than a letter, and thrust it into Gérard's hands.

"For me?" he asked.

"Pierre had this in his hand," she replied with a nod, "when he came out of his room. He said that I was to give it to you the very first opportunity I had of seeing you alone. I don't remember the exact words he used—he spoke quite quietly—but somehow he frightened me. Of course I thought it odd about this parcel—he saw you much oftener than I did—so I couldn't quite understand why he asked me to give it to you. But he kissed me good night after that and—and—I never saw him again."

The girl's story, told in short, disjointed sentences, had the effect of increasing Gérard's remorse. Here was obviously a message which Pierre had sent him, one possibly of utmost importance, and this was the first opportunity Cécile had of giving it to him. It was entirely his fault. He had certainly seen her several times during these last terrible days, but always in the presence of another person, when confidences could not be exchanged and sympathy could only be mutely expressed. He had made no great effort for it to be otherwise, while she probably was eating out her heart with longing to obey Pierre's last behest.

"Shall I open it?" he now asked, and she nodded assent.

The small parcel contained a couple of keys and a letter.

"Do you mind if I read it now?" he asked again.

"Of course not," she replied.

He went over to the window, thinking that perhaps the letter contained confidences which were not intended for a sister's ear. But this is what he read:

"My dear Gérard,

"I had no other means of letting you have this, so have been obliged to ask poor little Cécile. I know I need not commend her to your affection and to your care. Your sister-in-law is an angel and will look after her, until the day—soon, I hope—when she will be your wife. It is not about her that I am worried, but about friends and comrades. I won't name them, but you know who they are, most of them—your friends as well as mine. The act of justice which I am about to commit might have terrible consequences for them, for we are all of us deep in

this up to the neck. I think you knew, or rather guessed, that we held secret meetings where we dreamed dreams and made plans for the regeneration of France and her return to the only form of government ordained by God: the Bourbon monarchy. Part of these plans I am hoping to execute to-night. With the death of those upstarts, we may look forward to the day when we shall see an anointed King of France once more secure on his throne. But I wish to bear alone the consequences of this act, and it is to you who are above suspicion through your brother's position and so on, that I look to aid me in this; it is my last and supreme wish, Gérard, and I know that you will help me to fulfil it. I send you these two keys. One is the key of a room situated on the top floor of No. 23, Rue Mirabeau. It is a room which I rent under the name of Louis Roche, insurance agent, and where I keep all the papers relating to our royalist clubs all over France. Will you go there, Gérard, as soon as ever you can? Go up the back staircase. The name Roche is on the door. With the second key you will open a small iron chest which you will find there, it is full of papers and these will you burn if possible right away in the iron stove in the room. The fire is ready laid, and all you have to do is to put a match to it and throw the papers into the flames. All the others will guess that I have asked you to do this, for they know how strong is our friendship. They and many others will owe their life to you."

* * * * *

The letter ended thus abruptly and was signed "Pierre." Gérard read it through twice, then slipped it and the two keys into the inner pocket of his coat, after which he went back to Cécile. He smiled as he took hold of her hand.

"It is quite simple, Cécile dear," he said, and he spoke as gently, as reassuringly, as he could. "Pierre has asked me to do a little something which he did not care to ask anyone else to do for him. There is no reason to be frightened—I give you my word there is not. You see, a good-looking young man like Pierre was bound to have little secrets of his own which he could only confide to his friend—and not to his sister. You believe me, don't you?" he went on, seeing that there still lingered in her sweet, sad face a look of anxiety, if no longer of terror.

She looked up at him, trying to smile through her tears. Gérard raised her little hand to his lips, and even while he did so he was conscious of a certain feeling of regret that the cold hand-kiss

satisfied him, and that he was not seized with a wild desire to take this sweet girl in his arms and to kiss those soft lips of hers that were innocent of rouge.

When the Duchesse came back with a book in her hand she found the two of them sitting side by side, discussing the petition that was to be presented to the Emperor for permission to have Pierre interred in the family vault over at Fourvière. Nothing could have been more decorous, more sober than their attitude.

"It was like a cold draught down my spine," the old lady said when she referred to this episode, "to see those two. Of course, I ought to have known that Cécile, with her simple little soul, and none too great intellect, would never appeal to a man of Gérard's temperament, but at the time I knew nothing of that Lorendana. I only got his confidence later—much later—when the whole mischief was done. I knew that he had a warm affection for Cécile, and one always hopes that something more—what shall I say?—more vital will spring out of a boy and girl friendship. I thought that Gérard was heart-whole, and I still think that if Cécile had been just a little more sophisticated she could have captured him that day. But you know what our *jeunes filles* were in those days: no more guile in them than in a kitten. I was like that, too," the old lady added with the newest approach to a wink that such a *grande dame* could allow herself to indulge in, "my marriage with the Duke was arranged by my parents and his, and Gérard was only a schoolboy then."

With which enigmatical statement she ended her confidences that day, allowing me to draw my own conclusions.

CHAPTER 12

It must have been just about the same hour of that self-same day that Juanita Lorendana, the dancer, was ushered into the private office of M. Gabriel Prévost, a very important personage indeed, the right-hand man of M. Toulon, head of the *Cabinet Secret* and chief commissary of the secret police of the Empire.

M. Prévost had been sent by his chief to accompany the Emperor during his present tour round the big provincial cities of France. He was a tall, spare man, with narrow, hatchet face, a

sharp nose, keen eyes and thin lips. He was sparing of words, and had never been known to lose his temper or to show any enthusiasm; but the chief thought very highly of him, for Gabriel Prévost had the gift of nosing out secret societies and illegal political meetings, and was second only to M. Toulon himself in the art of detecting plots and treasons, even where none existed. Let alone when they did. He was also possessed of another gift, was this M. Prévost; he had the gift of sizing up personalities, of estimating the relative value of every employé of the *Cabinet Secret*. Towards the men he was always friendly in a cold, measured way; towards the women he was invariably courteous. He had never been known to offend or hurt the feelings of any member of the staff, and he was always ready to give both advice and help in any difficult task which he imposed on his subordinates.

It was into the presence of this man that Lorendana was ushered on this 20th day of June, five days after the attempted assassination of the Emperor by Pierre du Pont-Croix and twenty-fours hours after the latter's execution in the Fosse de la Part-Dieu. M. Prévost was sitting at his desk, busily writing when she came in. He did not look up as she came forward, but pointed to a chair with a slight movement of the hand that held the pen. Lorendana sat down and waited.

She was one of those rare women who know how to sit and wait without betraying either impatience or nervousness. When she first sat down she deposited her tiny parasol on the desk, disposed her voluminous skirt over her crinoline in exactly the right folds, straightened her shoulders, tapped her chignon and the set of her polonaise with a light touch, folded her gloved hands in her lap and crossed her small feet so that the points of her varnished shoes just showed below her skirts . . . and waited. Several minutes went by. Silence in the room remained unbroken save for the scratching of M. Prévost's pen and the monotonous ticking of an old-fashioned clock upon the wall.

After awhile, and without looking up from his work, Gabriel Prévost said:

"And so you are going to like your work," which was a statement rather than a question.

It was the girl who asked the question.

"You mean," she inquired, "am I going to find spying a congenial occupation?"

"If you like to put it that way, yes!" he replied.

"What makes you sure of that?" she asked.

Before he replied Gabriel Prévost laid down his pen, strewed sand over the letter he had been writing, re-read it, folded it, slipped it into an envelope and wrote out the address; all this very deliberately, and without casting another glance on the dancer, while she waited motionless and silent. He then rested his elbows on the desk, twined his long, lean fingers together, and at long last looked at her.

"You would not," he said, "be sitting there now if you had not made up your mind to go through with it."

The faintest shadow of a smile played round her lips, but this time she offered no comment.

"That is so, is it not?" he insisted.

She shrugged. "I suppose so," was all she said.

"You like the work?"

"It is interesting," was her non-committal reply.

"Shall we say, remunerative?" he rejoined with a *soupçon* of sarcasm.

She shrugged again, but said nothing.

Most men would have been irritated by her manner. It was an affectation, of course, as were her laconic speech and the indifference—real or assumed—which she displayed during this interview: an interview which concerned matters that would affect the whole of her life. Other men would have felt irritated. Not so Gabriel Prévost. The girl interested him. She was unusual, vaguely mysterious, beautiful certainly, and with an air of breeding and refinement which he had never met before in any aspirant to the employment which he was offering her. She certainly did not irritate him, for she intrigued him; his shrewd penetrating eyes were fixed on her face, noting the play of the heavy lids, the smile that came and went round her mobile mouth, and the tantalising mole which gave so much piquancy to her usually grave face. Nor did the vivid colouring of the lips displease him or the unnatural blackness of her hair.

Vaguely he wondered whence she came or what her parentage might be, but, frankly, he didn't care. She was so obviously the perfect tool for the work which his chief had in hand, and that was enough for Gabriel Prévost.

After a moment or two's silent contemplation of this perfect tool, he resumed abruptly:

"It was six months ago that I met you for the first time. You remember?"

"Of course," she replied.

"You were engaged to dance at one of the smaller music halls

of Paris. I was able to approach you. I guessed that you were poor, and I could see that the oldest of all professions did not appeal to you as a means of earning a livelihood. That is so still, I think?"

"It is," she replied curtly.

"I then made a proposition to you, namely, that you should serve your country in the way she needed it most: that you should enrol in that patriot's army of French men and women who devote their lives to unmasking the plots and conspiracies that are aimed at home and abroad against the security of France. I had already designed you for the political side of our activities. I put the proposition before you and saw at once that it did very strongly appeal to you. Was I right?"

"I thought," she admitted in her cool, matter-of-fact way, "that the life of a spy would be more interesting than dancing in music halls."

"Quite so," M. Prévost commented suavely. "Anyway, you were ready to accompany me to Lyons, where I wished to place you under the tuition of masters of the craft, so that you might learn the many—shall we say—tricks of the profession, the art of disguise, of ambiguous words, of swift movement of hands, and quick play of eyes. Also the underlying principles of every secret code that has been invented. Your teachers tell me that you too now are past master in all these crafts. So far, so good."

He paused and turned over some of the papers which littered his desk. One of these he picked up. Had the paper been transparent Lorendana could have read the word "Report" at the top of the page, and below it her name. Gabriel Prévost, after a moment or two, thrust the paper into a drawer and then resumed.

"I was interested to know how you would use the not inconsiderable sum of money which I placed at your disposal on your arrival in Lyons. I think you will admit that I put very few restrictions on the way you wished to order your life: what interested me was to learn how you would order it."

"It is all down in the report which you have just been reading," Lorendana put in somewhat disconcertingly.

"She has sharp eyes, this girl," thought M. Prévost, and was not dissatisfied that in this trifling incident she had outwitted him.

"A very satisfactory one," he was willing to admit. "You took an apartment in a poor quarter of the city, you took an engagement to dance at music-halls, you consorted only with your fellow artistes. There was one Antonio Sibarelli——"

"Otherwise Monsieur de Nicolet," she broke in calmly.

The girl was certainly sharp; her intelligence and quick perceptions were above the ordinary. M. Prévost could again congratulate himself on his acumen in having discovered her.

"Ah!" he remarked lightly, "you found him out, did you?"

"It wasn't difficult."

"Nicolet is one of our best men. A perfect genius at disguise."

On this she made no comment. Perhaps she was thinking of Nicolet, whom she knew as Antonio, the Italian acrobat, and the many times she had hoodwinked him over this, that and the other. "A perfect genius?" No man can be in love and remain a perfect genius in the woman's eyes—certainly not in the art of disguise, and Nicolet *alias* Antonio had tried to make love to Lorendana. But apparently M. Prévost, who knew everything about his subordinates, did not know that. It was not set down in the report.

But other things were set down. Minutely, too. The question of her apartment in the Rue Grenelle—"where you live like *a grande dame*," said M. Prévost, "with your Aubusson carpets and Louis XV furniture. I do not object to that," he hastened to add. "On the contrary, I admire your taste and I appreciate your cook. I was content so long as you did not find these months of probation too irksome."

He paused a moment and then insisted:

"Did you?"

"No," she replied, "I did not find them irksome."

"And you are ready to carry on now—on different terms, of course."

"Quite ready."

"You have thought it well over—from every point of view?"

"From every point of view."

"The pay in your case will be magnificent."

"So you led me to expect."

"You have no resources of your own?"

"None."

"Parents? Relatives?"

"None."

"A foundling?"

"I believe so."

"Who brought you up?"

"Madame Ruggieri."

"The dancer at the Opéra?"

"Yes."

"Why did she do that?"
"Bring me up, you mean?"
"Yes."
"I understand that I was found on her doorstep."
"I see. And you never knew your father?"
"Never."
"You haven't a husband somewhere, by any chance?"
The abrupt question brought the smile to her lips. She shook her head and said: "No."
Nothing could have been more perfect. M. Prévost had every reason to deem himself lucky. A woman like this one, young, beautiful, refined, without kith or kin, was one of the unique wonders of this world, and it was his good fortune to have discovered her, and by and by to present her to his chief, a perfect product of his schooling, and to say to him with a note of triumph: "Behold, 'tis I have found the future star of your *Cabinet Secret,* who will add lustre to your department; hers will be the work and yours the glory, for she may be the means one day of handing your name down to posterity as the saviour of France."
But all these thoughts M. Prévost kept buried in the recesses of his soul. To Lorendana he now said, speaking more earnestly and slowly than he had done hitherto:
"As I told you, right at the beginning, the work which I have in contemplation for you will lie in the political field. France is at the present moment the most powerful, as well as the most dreaded country in the world. Her influence is felt from end to end of the civilised globe. Her art, her literature are second to none. Her prestige is envied by every other nation; and every Frenchman and French woman can proudly say: 'It is to France that all countries look for guidance, for help and for protection.' You realise that, don't you?" M. Prévost asked.
She replied: "I suppose so," then added, "I have no country—no pride of country, I mean."
"That makes no matter," he retorted with a light shrug, "we have men and women of every nation working for us. Pride of work will suffice," he concluded dryly. Then, after he had again studied her face lengthily and fixed his penetrating glance on her, he resumed:
"The greatness of France has naturally aroused the envy of her rivals. We have vanquished Russia, and England is for the moment, nominally, our friend; but Prussia and her vassal, Austria, are our enemies: not yet openly because our diplomatic

relations are not broken off, but hardly a week goes by without our discovering some secret plot aimed at the security of France, some political intrigue to undermine the loyalty of our people and the popularity of our Emperor: more and more frequently now are there secret negotiations brewing in the Chancelleries of Europe which aim at coalition against France, plans are devised by apparently friendly countries for joint action in the event of one of the greater powers engaging in hostilities against us. It is one of the duties of the *Cabinet Secret* to discover correspondence relating to these intrigues, and good work has already been done in throwing light on some of those secret negotiations. But what we want," and here M. Prévost's manner became more earnest still, "is someone who can move within the inner circle of diplomatic society, someone who has the *entrée* to the *salons* of those *grandes dames* who lend their houses and the prestige of their position for the brewing of political hot-pots—someone who can see and hear what is going on, without arousing suspicion. It is for this important work," he concluded firmly, "that I have chosen you."

M. Gabriel Prévost having come to the end of his peroration leaned back in his chair. The most momentous part of this interview was yet to come, and no doubt for the moment he was communing with himself, with a view to collecting his thoughts and formulating in his mind the best way in which to broach the difficult subject. It is to be supposed that Lorendana too was conscious of the importance of what was yet to come, but there was nothing in her face to indicate that she was in any way impatient or as much as expectant. Hardened official though he was, Gabriel Prévost had kept an eye for beauty, and at the moment he doubted whether in all his life he had ever seen a prettier picture than the girl now presented. Her dress was of shot green silk draped over an underskirt of white muslin, and as it billowed over her ample crinoline, it had the effect of a white flower with its green sepals, and the upper part of her figure was like its slender stem. Her face was of creamy whiteness, with those scarlet lips, like a sharp cut above her small, pointed chin, and the blue veined lids rising and falling over those unfathomable eyes.

Yes! she would do, concluded M. Prévost. She would move in those exalted Court circles as one to the manner born. No one would suspect in this refined, elegant *grande dame*, the secret agent of M. Toulon. She was clear-sighted and she was shrewd. All would be well, providing the difficulty which still lay in the way of M. Prévost's plans could now be overcome.

"Have you ever thought of marriage?" he asked with that abruptness which so often served him in good stead when he wanted a straight answer.

She turned her eyes on him, and for the first time he was able to look straight into them, and recognised that they were of a deep, almost violet blue. But their expression he could not define. Experienced though he was in such matters, he did not know whether she was about to lie to him or to speak the truth.

All she said was: "No!"

"I am glad," he countered.

"Why?"

"It makes it easier."

"For me or for you?"

"Chiefly for you."

"You wish me to marry?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

There was a moment's pause, before Gabriel Prévost made answer to her question. He picked up a paper-knife and toyed with it for a time. At last he said:

"Obviously, Juanita Lorendana, the music-hall artiste, would not be admitted in the intimate *salon* of a *grande dame*."

"Obviously," she admitted.

"And so . . . you understand——?"

"I do."

M. Prévost continued to toy with the paper-knife, tapped it against the blotting-pad. Finally he threw it down.

"The question is——" he said. "Who?"

She shrugged, as much as to say: "That is your affair, not mine." But actually she said nothing of the sort, and he was forced to insist, for he still had a vague feeling that in an indefinable kind of way she was keeping something back from him, and that when she told him that she had never thought of marriage she was not speaking the truth. He reiterated the word "Who?" which was more a reflection than a query; and then for the third time he said: "Who?"

At this third reiteration Lorendana burst out laughing. This was the first time M. Prévost had heard her laugh. The laughter was gay, musical, light-hearted. More than ever did Gabriel Prévost congratulate himself on his choice. A woman who could laugh like that, without self-consciousness or vanity, would always know how to deal with men. But for the moment he thought it right to reprove her.

"It won't be easy to find the right man," he said sternly.

But already she had regained her usual grave, detached attitude.

"I am sure," she remarked.

"He must belong to the highest society—should be—or, at any rate, reputed to be—rich."

"Not to mention his looks and his age," she put in, looking serious.

"The whole transaction will have to appear plausible before the world. It is a hard puzzle . . ." he mused.

"But you have already solved it," she remarked quietly.

"What makes you say that?"

"You have," she retorted, "haven't you?"

And she rose from her chair, looking more than ever like a delicate flower. While she patted her dress into the right folds, touched her chignon and the strings of her little hat, smoothed down the fingers of her gloves, and picked up her tiny parasol, Prévost gave himself the satisfaction of again contemplating her. What a shrewd woman she was! While he was trying to mystify her, or to draw some sort of admission out of her, she had already read his thoughts. Even while he spoke of a hard puzzle, she knew that his keen brain had already found the solution. Well, if things turned out after this as he expected—and he saw no reason why they should not—it would indeed be a splendid report which he would have the honour of sending to his chief. It was with a smile of satisfaction that he, too, rose from his chair.

He touched the handbell on his desk, then took the necessary steps round to take leave of his fair subordinate.

He bowed ceremoniously before her.

"Mademoiselle Lorendana, my respects," he said, took one of her small gloved hands in his and patted it gently. "I am about to have the privilege—that is, if you will allow me—of kissing the hand of one who will contribute to the glory of France. You will do great things for France, Mademoiselle, all the greater since they must be done in the dark, and because, in order to accomplish them, you will have to risk many things which most women hold very dear. Go home to your apartment now, my pretty dear, leave Papa Prévost to ordain a brilliant future for you. It won't be long before this little hand will be given to a man who bears one of the great names of France."

He turned her hand over, deliberately undid the button of her glove, and imprinted a gallant kiss upon her wrist.

There was a knock at the door. A man in uniform entered and stood at attention, while Mademoiselle quietly buttoned up her

glove. Then, with a final slight inclination of her head, she went out of the room.

After Lorendana had gone, M. Prévost rubbed his lean hands contentedly together. Then he went back to his desk, sat down, and gave a low, prolonged whistle. A panel in the wall slid open noiselessly, and a man stepped out through the aperture into the room.

"Well, Nicolet," Prévost inquired without any preamble, "what do you think of her?"

"What I have always thought," the other replied, "that your choice has been most fortunate."

"Well then, go ahead, Nicolet," Prévost rejoined with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "go ahead. When do you think . . . ?"

"To-day, I shouldn't wonder," was Nicolet's curt reply.

"Well," M. Prévost rejoined, with that affability which he always displayed towards his subordinates. "I leave the matter entirely in your able hands, my good Nicolet. Remember that the sooner that marriage is celebrated, the better it will be for France, and the worse for those intriguers."

Whereupon Nicolet gave a brief salute, turned on his heel, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER

13

By a strange coincidence the Rue Mirabeau was situated in the same quarter of the city as the Rue Grenelle. Gérard after his interview with Cécile, betook himself to the Rue Birabeau without any waste of time. Pierre's last wishes had, alas! been left far too long unfulfilled; not another hour should pass before those important papers were burned, since, as Pierre said, they involved the lives of so many men.

Gérard, as he walked rapidly from the Place Bellecour towards the Saône, could not help meditating on the foolishness which prompted so many of his friends to put their head in a noose. What good could come, he thought, of all these secret conspiracies hatched by a discontented minority against a régime that was still firmly planted in public favour? Firmly? Well, perhaps not so very firmly as the inner Court circle would have wished, but how can

that same discontented minority reach the ear of a populace who, on the slightest provocation, was ready to cheer itself hoarse at sight of the Emperor? Nothing but a great social upheaval, brought about by some gigantic political cataclysm, would end the present régime, and a few hundred—or say a few thousand young enthusiasts could not bring such a cataclysm about. Nothing but the wrath of God, or a devastating war, could do that. And no one thought of war these days save as an added lustre to the military glory of France. There could be no such eventuality as defeat for the finest army the world had ever known, an army reared on the glorious traditions set up by the greatest military genius of all times. War indeed? A successful war would only establish the Napoleonic dynasty more firmly on the throne of France and in the hearts of her people.

So did Gérard de Lanoy muse as he gradually left behind him the fashionable quarter of Lyons, crossed the river Saône, and once more threaded his way through the narrow streets that clustered round the newly-built railway station—just as he had done twenty-four hours ago.

"Pardon, Monsieur, la Rue Mirabeau?"

"First on the left and second on the right."

"Merci, Monsieur."

And he hurried on. It was so like yesterday. Just as hot and just as dusty. Even his thoughts were very much the same. Thoughts of Lorendana and her exquisite hands: of Lorendana and her egregious black hair: of Lorendana and her unfathomable eyes. Above all, of Lorendana and her abominable trade. How many years of his life would not Gérard have bartered at this hour for the certainty that it was not Lorendana who had betrayed his friend! Yesterday he had almost believed her innocent. He had been so horribly, so overwhelmingly ashamed. If only he could know for certain! If only he could set these awful doubts at rest!

"Pardon, Monsieur, la Rue Grenelle?"

"Mais c'est ici, Monsieur."

Just like yesterday! He was standing at the corner of the street. Her apartment was not two hundred steps away. How he forced himself to turn his back on it he didn't know. Perhaps it was because he happened just then to thrust his hand into his pocket. It encountered the two keys and Pierre's letter. How could he betray the confidence which Pierre had placed in him? The trust was a sacred one. Pierre's last will and testament. And Gérard knew that if he did but enter that fairyland situated at No. 16, Rue Grenelle, the hours would slip by on the wings of time—perhaps

on the wings of love—and precious time would be lost that meant the lives of men. It required a big effort of will to turn away from the Rue Grenelle.

"Pardon, Monsieur, la Rue Mirabeau?"

"Next on your left, Monsieur."

* * * * *

The street, the house, were not unlike 16, Rue Grenelle. Fortunately the big outside doors were open and the concierge family at their lunch. Concierges in this part of the town seemed always to be at lunch. Fortunately this one did not disturb himself when Gérard walked rapidly past his lodge. He ran up the back staircase, which was just as dark and as dank as the one that led to the fairy palace. There were two doors on the top landing. One of them bore the name "Roche" on a card and below it the words *courtier en assurances*. There was no one about. One of the keys which Pierre had entrusted to him fitted easily into the lock: Gérard slipped inside the apartment and closed and locked the door behind him.

Facing him across a narrow hall there was another door, which was ajar. It had a panel of ground glass, and on the panel was painted the word "Bureau" in black letters, and below it "Entrez s.v.p." Gérard went in and found himself in a large square room, with two windows which gave on the street. There was a square of carpet on the floor and in the middle of it a large desk with various writing appurtenances upon it. There were a number of chairs round the room, and an iron stove at one end. In the recess of one of the windows stood the iron chest. Gérard opened it with the second key which Pierre had left for him. It was full of papers, for the most part neatly tied together in bundles. He took up a couple of these bundles and crossed over to the stove. He opened the small iron door, and saw that the fire was laid with a pine-cone and some small dry wood which would be very easy to set alight. On the mantelpiece behind the stove there was a box of matches. Gérard knelt down in front of the stove and set fire to the fir-cone; it blazed up at once. He thrust the first bundle of papers into the stove. And then the second. The papers were slow in catching fire, for most of them were tough. He waited a moment or two until the second bundle was well alight, then he rose and went over to the window to fetch more papers. Thus he went backwards and forwards three or four times from the window to the stove, and from the stove to the window, diving into the iron chest, taking out papers in bundles, thrusting them into

the fire, and standing by while they were being slowly consumed.

He had been some ten minutes or so at his task, and the chest was now more than half empty. He was in the act of stooping over it when there was a loud knock at the entrance door, followed by the peremptory summons: "In the name of the law!"

Gérard de Lanoy did not really know for certain whether he had expected this to happen. He had come to the Rue Mirabeau without any thought of his own safety, or of possible danger. Pierre in his last letter to him had expressly enjoined him to burn papers which, if found, would threaten the lives of a number of mutual friends: men like de Neuvic, and young Nauplie, de Méricourt most certainly, as he never could keep out of political intrigues, for which he had a positive passion. Friends, in any case, with whom Gérard had shared pleasures, excitements, pageants: friends for whose personal safety he would have risked much and endured much. And in a flash, while the loud summons: "Au nom de la loi!" was again repeated, he realised that he had indeed risked much.

He hadn't thought about that before: if he had he would have come just the same. As a matter of fact there were no precautions that he could have taken against this danger—the danger of discovery, and its inevitable consequences. If he had come at night, or at any other time of the day, it would have been just the same. And he had never thought of precautions. Pierre had enjoined him to do a certain thing, which, as he said in his letter—a sacred trust, that letter!—he could not ask anyone else to do for him! "I wish," Pierre had written before he went out on that momentous errand which he knew would cost him his life, whichever way it went, "I wish to bear alone the consequences of this act, and it is to you who are above suspicion, through your brother's position, that I look to aid me in this." Pierre had written that, and it was his last will and testament sent to the one friend whom he trusted more than anyone else in all the world.

Well, of course, no one was above suspicion these days, and Pierre du Pont-Croix's friendship for Gérard de Lanoy was almost proverbial. It wasn't likely, was it, that Toulon and his sleuths would be ignorant of it? It was not likely that Pythias being gone, Damon would not be watched. He had been so closely watched in fact that Toulon's mouchards had been on his heels ever since Pierre was arrested, and to-day they tracked him to this house. Gérard was no fool, but he had not thought of that. His mind had been engrossed for three days with Pierre's trial and his in-

evitable fate, and after that with Lorendana, her exquisite hands, her enigmatic smile, and her abominable trade.

But even if Lorendana had not engrossed his every thought, he would not have spent a minute's reflection on the possibility of his being shadowed. Fortunately he had had those ten minutes in which to accomplish his task. The papers—most of them were burned. There were just a few—a very few—and the flames were roaring up the chimney, while the order was being given outside to break open the door in the name of the law. Gérard never lost his head for a moment; he was not the man ever to lose his head. He dived for the last time into the iron chest and took out all the papers that were left. Pierre's letter he took out of his pocket, and then threw the lot into the stove. He watched the papers as they twisted and curled and blackened till the flames had their full way with them.

And all the while the old-fashioned door resisted the battering and the drumming which it got. But it gave way at last, fell with a crash into the narrow hall and shattered the glass panel of the inner door. Three men in uniform and two in civilian clothes stepped into the *Bureau*. "Entrez s.v.p." was painted on the door. What irony!

It tickled Gérard's sense of humour, and it was with a laugh that he turned away from the stove and faced the five men.

"Entrez s'il vous plaît!" he said.

One of the men in the uniform of the police wore stripes, indicative of superior rank. He it was who now spoke to Gérard de Lanoy.

"What are you doing here?" he asked peremptorily.

"As you see, Monsieur," Gérard replied with a light shrug, "nothing for the moment."

"Why did you not immediately obey the summons to open in the name of the law?"

"I must have been dreaming. Please excuse me, Monsieur, for keeping you and your friends waiting. What can I do for you?"

To this the police officer made no reply. He nodded to one of his subordinates, and with a glance indicated the stove. The man stepped across to it and let down the small iron door. Inside the stove a bunch of papers was still smouldering. The officer pointed to these first and then to the iron chest in the window.

"You were burning papers," he said curtly, once more addressing Gérard.

"Obviously," Gérard replied.

"What were they?"

"I do not know."

"You lie."

There was a moment's silence in the room, after those two words were spoken by a man in the exercise of his official functions, and surrounded by his subordinates, to one who was alone and entirely helpless. Through the silence, only the final crackling of burnt papers could faintly be heard, and the fall of ashes into the pan. Even the traffic in the street below seemed momentarily hushed, while the bearer of an historic name received the deadly insult full in the face. The two men looked one another in the eyes for a few seconds. Neither of them flinched: neither the officer, conscious of his duty, nor the proud descendant of the Lanoys. But Gérard's face had become the colour of dead ashes, his lips were tightly pressed together and his hands clenched so tightly that the knuckles shone, white and polished like ivory. At last he said:

"My position and yours, Monsieur, makes it impossible for me to strike you in the face. You no doubt remembered that, before you ventured to insult a defenceless man."

But the other remained imperturbable. Scenes like the present one had no doubt often occurred during the course of his official life. All he did was to nod once more to his subordinates.

"Search him," he commanded.

Resistance would have been both futile and undignified. Gérard did not attempt it. He stood quite still, while the two men in uniform held him by the shoulders, and the plain-clothes ones went through his pockets. Thank Heaven he had not forgotten Pierre's letter when he threw the last lot of papers into the fire! Cécile's name was mentioned in it, and the possibility of her becoming his wife one day. Gérard was deeply thankful that her name would be kept out of this affair. He was thinking of Cécile at the moment that one of the men took his letter-case out of his pocket, and handed it to his commanding officer. There was nothing in it that he would mind—not specially mind—any stranger seeing. He had never been one for keeping *billets-doux* which might prove compromising to a woman, or notes which related to his private affairs.

But presently the same man, diving once more in Gérard's pocket, found the small ivory tablets, between the leaves of which the young man had a few evenings ago placed a faded rose. A hot flush of anger rose to his pale face when he saw the police officer finger those tablets and open them, then give a short, knowing laugh as the flower fell out of the tablets and fluttered to the

ground. Back to the dust, was Gérard's immediate thought, where it rightly belongs. The police officer put his heel on it, and then tossed the tablets and the letter-case to his subordinate. And somehow it seemed to Gérard as if, with the final crushing of that flower, his thoughts of Lorendana also ceased to be; that they crumbled into dust like those faded crimson petals, and were submerged in nothingness.

CHAPTER 14

Gérard de Lanoy was conveyed by train to Paris that selfsame afternoon, there to stand his trial on a charge of high treason against the State. He was not allowed to communicate either with his brother or with any of his friends. Except for the fact that the trial was held in Paris, it was in no way different to the one Pierre du Pont-Croix had to stand. As a matter of fact it was not a trial at all—just an investigation held by Monsieur Lucien Toulon, Chief Commissary of the Imperial Secret Police, who, in cases of this sort, was judge and jury and prosecuting counsel all in his own person.

Gérard, accused of high treason against the State, was not allowed legal advice, nor was he permitted to communicate with the family lawyer of the Lanoys. This, he was told by M. Toulon, would only be permitted after he had confessed to his crime. Since he had been caught red-handed, confession alone might save him—might!—from the extreme penalty of the law. In the meanwhile he was incarcerated in a cell in that portion of the Palais de Justice which was reserved for the activities of M. Toulon and his staff. At intervals during the next five days and nights he was hauled out of his cell and brought into the presence of the investigating judge.

Gérard's first impression of Monsieur Toulon was not an unpleasant one. It was an impression which every prisoner had when first brought to the presence of the Chief Commissary of the Imperial Secret police. Not unpleasant, rather the reverse, for Monsieur Toulon exuded benevolence.

He was short, broad-shouldered and had very fat thighs. His face was large and round—that is to say it would have been round but

for the tuft of coarse grey hair on the point of his chin. His small dark eyes glittered like beads through the folds of fat on the lids. His cheeks were flabby, and his head bald. He had podgy hands, and wore a large ruby ring on the fourth finger of his right one. His feet were abnormally small for the weight they had to carry, with the result that he invariably suffered from swollen ankles. Whilst interrogating his prisoners Monsieur Toulon always sat bolt upright, with his podgy hands crossed over his abdomen. He sweated profusely, and used a large coloured handkerchief to mop his bald head and the back of his neck. His clothes fitted him loosely, and his trousers always looked a size too short for him. He wore a monocle precariously poised in his right eye.

No. There certainly was nothing terrifying either in the appearance or the attitude of Monsieur Toulon, although critical persons were apt to say that the tuft of hair on his chin did give him the appearance of a vicious goat. But privileged members of his staff called him affectionately Papa Toulon. They declared that he never indulged in a night's rest, only snatched a few hours' sleep on a couch in the large, bare room which was his private bureau, where he interrogated the prisoners. Gérard got to know that room well; it represented purgatory for him at first, and then hell. Three or four times during the night he would be hauled out of his cell and marched between two warders to the Chief Commissary's private bureau. There he would find Monsieur Toulon, invariably spruce and tidy, with no trace of sleep in his eyes. Most times Monsieur Prévost, second in command, sat beside his Chief. One was lean, and the other was fat; both were equally wide awake, looking for all the world like vultures waiting for their prey.

On the rare occasions when the Chief Commissary was absent from his bureau Monsieur Prévost carried on the examination of the prisoner on his own. The questions and cross-questionings were always the same:

"What were the papers you were so intent on burning?"

"Family papers."

"Who was Louis Roche, *courtier d'assurances*?"

"A friend."

"Where is he now?"

"He is dead."

"Were you a relation of his?"

"No."

"Then why should you have interfered with his papers?"

"Because he asked me to."

"When?"
"Just before he died."
"Where did he die?"
"Abroad."
"I asked you where he died. 'Abroad' is too vague."
"I am sorry. I do not know the exact locality."
"Yet you took it on yourself to interfere with his papers?"
"He asked me to burn them."
"What kind of papers were they?"
"Family papers."

And the whole string of questions began all over again. In a different form sometimes, and sometimes with additions:

"Why should this Louis Roche have so many family papers?"
"I don't know."
"Where was his home?"
"Abroad."
"I asked you where his home was. 'Abroad' is too vague."

The constant reiteration of the same questions—eternally the same—had the effect, so obstinately desired by M. Toulon, of exacerbating the prisoner's nerves, of confusing his thoughts and causing him to give crooked, unconsidered answers.

Monsieur Toulon had a smooth voice, and he never once departed from his attitude of benevolence. That is, not for the first two days—and nights. Oh, those nights! Gérard's cell was airless; he could hardly breathe at times, much less sleep. Nevertheless, whenever a warder came to fetch him at the command of the Chief Commissary, he always seemed to wake abruptly from something that was neither sleep nor yet a dream. In the corridors of the Palais de Justice the air was sultry—the kind of atmosphere which one gets in a valley when a storm is brewing; and yet when Gérard was hurried along to M. Toulon's bureau, he had to button up his coat, for he was shivering.

After the first thirty-six hours of this mental torment, Gérard loathed the sight of Monsieur Toulon and his second in command. The one fat and outwardly benevolent, the other spare and straight and always silent when his Chief was by. And when Gérard sat opposite those two he looked into two pairs of eyes, and in them he read the determination to destroy him, to bring him down in the same way that they had brought Pierre down, until he lay, an inert mass, at the bottom of a ditch.

At first he had fought vigorously against this sense of fatalism. He tried to keep his head cool, his nerves under control. After all, they could not prove anything against him. He was innocent of

treason, and he belonged to a caste which these minions would not dare attack in the person of a Vicomte de Lanoy. But in this surmise he was wrong.

The Vicomte de Lanoy was an important capture for the staff of Monsieur Toulon to have effected. To have caught a man of such high social position red-handed, and to find him guilty of high treason, would certainly redound to the credit of the *Cabinet Secret* and of its chief. Monsieur Toulon therefore put forth all his ingenuity towards extracting a confession from this obstinate young man; he had to be proved guilty at all costs, but matters would be so much easier for everybody afterwards if a confession could be got from him. And in this laudable ambition to prove himself a zealous servant of the Empire, Monsieur Toulon was ably supported by his second in command, Monsieur Gabriel Prévost.

The two men took it in turns to interrogate and harass the prisoner, and this they did at intervals of never more than two hours. Suddenly, at all hours of the day or night, a summons would come demanding the attendance of the prisoner for further cross-examination.

"What were the contents of the papers which you burned before the arrival of the police?"

"I do not know."

"Surely you glanced at some of them?"

"I did not."

And after the first thirty-six hours of this wearisome repetition, Gérard, tired to death, would continue to murmur mechanically, in answer to questions he hardly ever heard now: "I do not know" or "I cannot tell."

Papa Toulon was getting impatient. Not that he showed it. He was used to the obstinacy of prisoners who hoped by procrastination to mitigate the ultimate sentence. And so Papa Toulon, being used to such things, had his nerves under control. He showed neither impatience nor irritation, although this case was in many ways different to any other he had before. Du Pont-Croix was quite one thing: good family and all that, but his mother had been under a cloud over her affair with the Duchesse de Berry, and his enmity towards the dynasty was well known and undisputable. But this Vicomte de Lanoy business was quite another matter. The Lanoys were immensely wealthy and very influential. The head of the family—own brother to the Vicomte—had a high position at Court, and his wife the Duchesse was an intimate friend of the Empress. They were certainly known to be Legiti-

mists by tradition, but it was equally well known that they had always held aloof from politics, and never taken part in any of the intrigues hatched against the re-establishment of the Empire.

Undoubtedly the Lanoys were very influential indeed, and if sentence of high treason against the Vicomte was pronounced—and executed—on no other evidence but that of the Secret Police, family influence might be brought to bear rather unpleasantly against the Chief Commissary. Now if confession—real admission of guilt—could be got out of this young man, why, then Monsieur Lucien Toulon would be in clover, patted on the back for his zeal, even promoted perhaps to something more brilliant than his present onerous position.

It was during the fifth night which Gérard de Lanoy had spent, sleepless, partly in his cell and partly in the bureau of Papa Toulon. The Chief Commissary sent for him in the small hours of the morning—the best time of the day for the purpose which Papa Toulon had in view, when vitality is at its lowest and tension on the nerves most acute.

M. Prévost, second in command, was not present at this interview. Gérard, on entering the bureau, weary though he was, noted at once that M. Toulon had changed his tone. He looked more urbane than ever, offered him a cigarette and suggested a sip of old Cognac. Gérard, too utterly spent to be surprised at anything, took the cigarette, but refused the brandy. M. Toulon was gracious enough to strike a match and light a cigarette for him. He then lit one for himself and, leaning forward on his desk, began speaking in pleasant, low tones.

"Look here, young man," he said genially, "you have got yourself into an unholy predicament, haven't you?"

Gérard puffed away at his cigarette, and nodded his weary head drowsily up and down.

"Haven't you?" Monsieur Toulon rapped out suddenly at the top of his voice, and he banged on the desk with his fist, so that everything on it rattled. Gérard gave a start, like a man suddenly wakened from sleep. Only he was not a man wakened from sleep; it was his jaded nerves that had suddenly received another shock and made him give a start.

Monsieur Toulon, once more suave and pleasant, then reiterated in his usual mellow voice:

"Haven't you, my friend?"

"I suppose so," Gérard murmured dreamily. He was enjoying that cigarette. It soothed his nerves. If only that man did not make

such a row! He didn't mind his going on talking if he did it in a subdued voice, but all that shouting was unendurable. Fortunately for the moment Monsieur Toulon was talking quite pleasantly and quietly:

"I dare say," he was saying, "that you won't believe me, but I can assure you that I am greatly distressed at seeing you in this predicament. A man of your birth, your family connections, your wealth! We, the servants of France, do not like to see her aristocratic sons brought to a criminal bar. Treason is such a very ugly word—don't you agree with me, my dear Vicomte?"

"I do," Gérard murmured; "but it does not apply to anything I have done."

"Come, come," Monsieur Toulon rejoined, speaking like an indulgent parent to a wayward child, "we won't go so far as that, my young friend. You have been foolish, very foolish, but, luckily for you, I am a man of understanding and of sympathy. There is nothing that would grieve me more than to take severe measures against you. But your obstinacy makes things so difficult for me. So terribly difficult!"

He sighed and did indeed look terribly distressed.

"Have another cigarette," he said, and once more most courteously lighted Gérard's cigarette for him. After which he went on:

"It would make everything so much easier if you would make a clean breast of the truth to me."

And M. Toulon sighed like a man who sees a cherished hope fade into disappointment. He picked up a paper-knife and toyed with it, tapping it against the desk. Tapping it. Tapping it. It was a trick peculiar not only to himself, but to M. Prévost, his second in command; it was considered most effective when prisoners under examination were proving obdurate. M. Toulon's small, beady eyes, encased in their fat lids, were fixed upon Gérard. He allowed the monocle to drop from his right eye, and he continued to gaze on the prisoner, noting with satisfaction that at every little tap-tap of the paper-knife upon the desk a slight twitch ran over the young man's face. So he continued that little tap-tap which was proving such a valuable aid in the work of subduing the obstinacy of this young fool. Now he sighed again and reiterated his pious wish:

"If only you would make a clean breast of the truth to me, my dear Vicomte!"

"But what in Heaven's name do you want me to say?" That monotonous tap-tap irritated Gérard almost beyond endurance, but

the cigarette was soothing and he found himself speaking almost calmly.

"Those papers, now," M. Toulon resumed. "What were they?"

"I have told you a dozen times that I don't know."

"You must have had some idea."

"I did not."

"Then who was this Louis Roche?"

"I told you. A friend."

"What connection had he with your other friend, Pierre du Pont-Croix?"

"I cannot tell."

"Then let *me* tell you, my obstinate young friend," Monsieur Toulon rejoined blandly, "that Pierre du Pont-Croix and Louis Roche were one and the same person. Ah!" he went on, as if in response to the quick glance which his words had drawn on him from Gérard, "it surprises you that I happen to know this. You did not realise before that there is not much in the way of intrigue or treachery that escapes the personnel of the *Cabinet Secret*. Yes! my young friend, I have known all along that Pierre du Pont-Croix and Louis Roche were one and the same, and I knew that you knew it too, and that it was just your obstinacy that caused you to withhold confession of so obvious a fact. Deny it now if you can," Papa Toulon continued in his smoothest, most ingratiating manner, "but it won't serve you either way at this eleventh hour, whether you deny it or not."

And he went on tap-tapping the paper-knife against the desk, and staring at Gérard, noting with extreme satisfaction the weakening of the will under the influence of exasperated nerves. He noted the twitching of the jaw, the restless play of the eyes, the quiver of the sensitive lips. Another effort and Papa Toulon would have the confession which he so much desired and which would put him right in the eyes of the world, should the influence of the Lanoy family be ever exerted against him for his undoing, or his eventual disgrace.

"You can't deny it, can you?" he asked unctuously, whilst the paper-knife went persistently tap-tap.

Gérard made no reply. What was the good, since his tormentor had just told him that at this eleventh hour nothing would avail? Tap-tap went the paper-knife and Monsieur Toulon resumed:

"And the papers which you were so intent on destroying were papers that related to du Pont-Croix's abominable deed. Were they not?"

Tap-tap. Tap-tap, went the paper-knife.

"You knew that, and that in those papers there were the names of other friends of yours, fellow-conspirators, what? fellow-assassins!"

Tap-tap. Tap-tap. And now Papa Toulon's mellifluous voice was hardly distinguishable from that irritating tap-tap.

Gérard threw down his cigarette. He put both hands to his ears. But Papa Toulon only tapped his paper-knife louder than before. With his free hand, he picked up a paper out of many on his desk and thrust it under Gérard's gaze: then he took up a pen, dipped it in the ink, and with a bland smile and an engaging gesture held it towards the prisoner. And thus he waited, always smiling and looking the picture of benevolence until Gérard's hands dropped on the desk and his blurred vision wandered from the paper in front of him, thence to the pen, and finally to that bald, fat face with the tuft of coarse hair on the chin. He closed his eyes, conscious that to stare at it even for a moment would lead the way to madness. After a moment or two he opened his eyes again and looked down on the paper once more.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Just something for you to sign, my dear Vicomte," came in mellow tones out of that fat, bald face, "something that will make everything so much easier for you. Shall I read it to you? Your eyes are tired, and the light is none too good, is it?"

Monsieur Toulon drew the paper back to him, and in his most benevolent tones read its contents out loud, while Gérard made a final and desperate effort to collect his wits, to listen and to understand what was being read.

> "I acknowledge that I was associated with Pierre du Pont-Croix in a murderous plot against the person of the Emperor, and that at the moment of my arrest I was engaged in destroying papers that implicated me and others."

With an elegant gesture of his podgy hand Monsieur Toulon flung the paper across the desk so cleverly that it alighted just under the prisoner's nose. And once more he dipped the pen into the ink and held it out persuasively to Gérard.

"Quite simple you see," he said affably: "if you will sign it, my young friend, everything will be made so much easier for you. The Emperor is so lenient, where young men of your *monde* are concerned. One never knows: but anyway it implicates no one, save du Pont-Croix, who has already suffered for his crime. That delicate thing you gentlemen of noble birth call honour is entirely safeguarded."

Gérard took up the paper and read it through once and even twice carefully. The light was dim, and his vision none too clear, but the words were clear enough and they did penetrate to his brain. No! there was nothing there to implicate anyone save himself. Pierre from out the spirit-world would see that he, Gérard, had obeyed his last wish and safeguarded his honour and the life of his comrades. Well, Gérard supposed, there was no reason why he should not put his name to this lie. What did it matter anyway? These filthy spies meant to have his life, so let them have it sooner rather than later, before mental torment had made a drivelling maniac of him. What did it matter anyway? The tap-tapping had ceased, thank God for that! and if he kept his eyes fixed down on this tissue of lies, he need not see that monstrously hideous fat face, with the tuft on the chin which reminded one of a vicious goat. No! he need not look at it again. For one thing he was too tired to raise his eyes. What he wanted was sleep. A few hours' sleep in which to pull himself together, and face the firing squad as Pierre had done. Calmly and without flinching. After all, what did it matter? It was fatality and the will of God. Why God willed it he didn't know, but he had been brought up to believe that all the turpitudes of men, the cruelty, the crimes, were somehow the result of God's will.

So it was God's will that the man with the fat face should so irritate his nerves that now he was ready to put his name to a lie. But anything for peace. Anything for quietude and sleep.

He signed the paper. His hand did not even shake. There it was: the signature, "Gérard de Lanoy." By it he owned himself to be a potential assassin. Well! Pierre had been a potential assassin, and there was no finer man in the world than Pierre.

Well then, what of it?

How he got back to his cell after that, Gérard de Lanoy never knew.

CHAPTER

15

THERE is one point on which I have not liked to dwell. The Duchesse was always very reticent about it, although Gérard did confide the truth to her. But that was not till long afterwards. As

a matter of fact he could not have had a more sympathetic confidante than Fanny de Lanoy, a woman who had experienced every emotion in life that falls to the lot of woman. And when it comes to the most devastating of all emotions, why! the beautiful Duchesse knew more about it, in spite of her spotless reputation, than any woman of her time. She declared that Gérard had loved Juanita Lorendana from the first moment he set eyes on her. Else, why the placing of that faded flower between the tablets of memory? "He was not in love with her, my dear," the dear old lady often said to me, "he just loved her. Which is quite a different thing."

And she said this to me fifty years after the abysmal event which went near to breaking her heart, and who should know better than this exquisitely virtuous *grande dame* the difference between being in love and just loving.

But, she often averred, Gérard did not know at the time that he loved the girl. Not during those five days' martyrdom while his nerves were on the rack, and he spent sleepless nights wondering whether this was the way that men went mad. He thought that he hated her: and he was still too young to know that hatred and love are so nearly akin, that no man has ever been able to differentiate between the two. Women, yes! but not men! They think that they hate a woman, when all the time they are ready to sacrifice life, honour, anything and everything at her bidding, for a smile, a kiss—so they think, but really for her love. And Gérard thought he hated Lorendana: he persuaded himself that it was she who had spied on Pierre and sold him to that egregious Monsieur Toulon, and that it was she who had tracked him, Gérard, to the house in the Rue Mirabeau. During those five nights and days of hellish torment, whenever he returned to his cell body- and nerve-racked, he would sit on the narrow truckle-bed provided for him, bury his head in his hands and repeat to himself over and over again: "I owe this to her. She spied on Pierre and she spied on me. She plies that filthy trade. She owns to it. I hate her! I hate her! I hate her mysterious eyes, her scarlet lips, that hideous, dyed hair. I hate the very sound of her name."

And the next moment he would throw himself down on the hard bed, with his face buried in the lumpy pillow, and he would fight his real self which would keep on murmuring: "No! you do not hate her, and you know it. You love her as no man on earth has ever loved before. You love her because of that tantalising play of eyes, which holds the key to her personality, and only reveals what she wishes you to know; you love her because of the

mystery which surrounds her, because of her exquisite hands, the touch of which is like that of an angel's wing, because—because she is she, unlike any other woman upon earth, Lorendana the divine. She did not sell Pierre, and you know it. She could not have tracked you down to the Rue Mirabeau, then why try and hate her, when you know that love of her has become your life, the marrow of your bones, the beating of your heart?"

There is no doubt, and the Duchesse always thought so, that he fought so desperately for his life during those five days because he longed passionately to see Lorendana again. Of course, that perverse self of his would try and persuade him that he only longed to see her in order to fulfil the great purpose which he had set to himself when first he realised who and what she was, when, standing by the wall of the Fosse de la Part-Dieu, he first suspected that she was responsible for the death of his friend. He had sworn to kill her then, and now when he was facing his own death he fought for his life because life meant seeing Lorendana again, because life would give him the right to love her, to snatch her out of the tentacles that held her to her abominable trade, to give her the shelter of his name and of a home, and to see the mysterious, unfathomable glance of her eyes change to a simple one of contentment and happiness.

"I know he loved the girl in that way," the Duchesse would often conclude, when she opened her kind old heart to me, "or he never would have acted as he did. People have blamed him, I know: they have said hard things about him, but they were people—I won't call them men and women, but just creatures—who have never loved: not as Gérard knew how to love. That boy had depths of tenderness and chivalry in him that only a few—a very few noble souls—could understand.

"You of the young generation," she would say to me—and this was thirty years ago—"you of the younger generation don't understand love as we understood it." And I could not help thinking of what she would say of the generation of to-day. "Love," she went on, "seems to have such diversity of meanings: it is not only a matter of different generations, but of different outlook altogether. But love to be love must be compounded of body and soul: without this duality it is either sordid or unreal. Before my time, in the days of knighthood and chivalry it was unreal: it was made up of ideals and self-deception: but you of the coming generations tend the other way. Men no longer have ideals: women give them no chance to have any. But Gérard was different. His real self idealised this Lorendana, while his perverse

self strove to bring her down to earth and thus nearer to him."

All that Fanny de Lanoy said about Gérard was no doubt true. He did not know himself during those five days and nights how completely Lorendana had taken possession of him, body and soul. He thought during that time that he was fighting for his life, but he was really fighting for possession of her. When he signed that lying confession he did it from sheer weariness, a longing for rest so that he could think of Lorendana in peace, and a longing for sleep so that he might dream of her. The Duchesse always would have it that the cigarette which "that beast Toulon" invariably gave to prisoners in the last stage of their examination was drugged. I think that is more than likely, seeing that when Gérard was back in his cell after he had "put his name to that lie," he remembered nothing more. Nothing at all until well into the morning. "And then," the Duchesse said, "the poor boy had an abominable headache."

CHAPTER 16

It was late in the afternoon when Gérard was again summoned to appear before the investigating judge, to hear his sentence, he supposed. After which, thank God! there would not be many hours to get through before he would face the firing squad as Pierre had done.

Monsieur Toulon was looking the picture of benevolence. He was perspiring profusely, and his fat face was wreathed in smiles. The sobriquet "Papa Toulon" was suiting him to perfection. His desk was, as usual, littered with papers and in his podgy hands he held a large official-looking letter.

"Do sit down, my dear Vicomte," he said genially as soon as Gérard entered the room. "I have excellent news for you. Have a cigarette?" he said, and Gérard, remembering that the cigarettes he had been given the night before had proved very soothing, accepted one now. Monsieur Toulon, in his most courteous manner, put down the official-looking letter, struck a match, and lit the cigarette for *ce cher Vicomte*. Then he picked the letter up again, allowed the monocle to fall from his eye, and gazed over the paper with fatherly benignity on Gérard.

"What did I tell you, my obstinate young friend?" he began in his most unctuous tone. "What did I tell you? Here were you as wilful and as impervious to reason as a naughty child, while Papa Toulon was doing his best—his very best—to save you from the consequences of your foolish actions. If you had not at last yielded to persuasion and had not yesterday listened to his advice nothing could have saved you, my dear Vicomte—nothing."

And M. Toulon looked as if he was going to cry, so distressed did he seem at what might have happened to his dear young friend if he had persisted in his wilfulness. But though Gérard had had a few hours of quietude, he was still in a state of nervous irritation and he found Monsieur Toulon's bland manner particularly exasperating. So he met the Commissary's benevolent glance with one that was as lowering as a thunder-cloud.

"What the devil do you mean?" he asked, and but for the soothing influence of the cigarette he probably would have spoken more rudely still.

But Papa Toulon seemed impervious to rudeness this afternoon, and so indulgent!

"There! there!" he said. "Don't lose your temper, my dear young friend. Did I not say that I have excellent news for you? Will you hear it now, or would you rather finish your cigarette first?" He paused a moment, then added: "Have a glass of this delicious *Fine*? It is nearly a hundred years old and as mild as milk." And his podgy hand closed over the neck of a bottle which was covered with cobwebs and stood at his elbow with a couple of glasses.

"For God's sake come to the point!" Gérard blurted out impatiently and refused the brandy.

"You don't mind if I . . . ?" rejoined M. Toulon, quite unperturbed by the prisoner's impatience. He poured out a small glassful of Cognac for himself, drank it down very deliberately, and very deliberately put the glass down again. He then readjusted the monocle in his right eye. All this he did with studied slowness, leisurely, with such obvious purpose of irritating the prisoner that Gérard was on the point of giving way to a fit of futile rage. Luckily he did keep a hold on himself. It was difficult, but he did contrive to swallow his impatience. He did not give that fat-faced beast the satisfaction of seeing him again on the rack. So after a time Monsieur Toulon came very near to the point—though not quite immediately.

"It was my good fortune," he said, "to obtain an audience of His Majesty early this morning. While you were asleep I was at

work on your behalf. I spoke to His Majesty about you. I put your case before him. Remember that this was the man—your Emperor, my dear Vicomte—whom your friend, Du Pont-Croix, tried to assassinate—to assassinate," Monsieur Toulon insisted, "with your knowledge and approval."

And saying this Monsieur Toulon tapped with his fat fingers on one of the papers which littered his desk. It was the confession which Gérard had signed the night before. Gérard threw a glance at it and quickly swallowed the words of protest that had come to his lips. No good, he felt, would be served by trying to confute the monstrous lie to which he had put his name a few hours ago.

"Our gracious sovereign, the Emperor," Monsieur Toulon went on unctuously, "has the most humane, the most forgiving soul of any man alive, but even you, my dear Vicomte, must admit that it is not easy to forgive a man who has connived at murdering you." Monsieur Toulon gave a little shrug. "I do not claim to have great powers of oratory, but, if I may say so without vanity, I put forth my plea with such eloquence this morning that His Majesty, who was very wrathful at first—you can't wonder at that, can you?—soon lent a gracious ear to my words."

This time Monsieur Toulon poured himself out a glass of water and drank that down. Gérard had now been sitting opposite to him for close on a quarter of an hour, and he was still on the rack to know what the "fat beast's" deliberate slowness meant for him. Was it death on the morrow, or was it life?

Life or death to a fellow-creature; and there was nothing that Monsieur Lucien Toulon, Chief Commissioner of the Imperial Secret Police, enjoyed so much as to keep a fellow-creature in suspense.

"Could any other man," the Duchesse de Lanoy would ask with a quaint little sigh, "except Gérard have kept so patient and so still? Can't you see them now, those two? That fat beast Toulon—I knew him, and I am thankful to say he came to a miserable end—and our elegant, silent, proud Gérard. The poor boy! he sat, he told me, all of a heap, feeling as if he had no backbone left. Gérard, no backbone? I ask you! The finest fellow that ever lived. And he proved that, didn't he? But there is a vast difference," she sighed, "between moral and physical backbone, and my poor Gérard was at the end of his tether. He had come to what he so often called the dead-end. The overfed leech had fastened on the lion and sucked his blood till the noble lion had no more fight in him."

It took some time before M. Toulon's exposé of the new situa-

tion penetrated into Gérard de Lanoy's brain and stayed there, some time before the dead-end presented itself in this altogether new light. The Chief Commissary had been droning on for some time in his smooth, oily tones, almost as if he had a hot potato in his mouth all the while—that was how Gérard often described the latter part of his final interview with "Papa Toulon." He rolled out the words, meaningless words for the most part, with perpetual "Is it?" and "Can you?" and "Wasn't it?" interlarded; questions for which, thank God! he no longer insisted on having an answer. But meaningless words all the time, and delay while he drank water, or lighted a cigarette, put down one paper and picked up another. Delay! procrastination! while a fellow-creature was there, waiting for sentence of death, was sitting there almost motionless, only now and then bringing the cigarette to his lips, but trying, trying all the time to get an inkling of what the fat beast was driving at.

And suddenly one phrase amidst a welter of meaningless words poured out by those flaccid lips struck his ears and penetrated to his brain—then faded out again, and again struck his ears.

"His Majesty," that was the phrase, "has at my earnest request granted you pardon for your abominable crime."

Gérard's brows almost met in a deep frown. He was trying to understand, trying—oh, so hard! But he was very tired, and his brain was fagged. But the phrase . . .

"His Majesty, at my earnest request, has granted you pardon . . ."

The rest trailed off, faded out. . . . Only the two words remained: "Granted . . . pardon . . ." What did they mean? Of course, he did not understand them. They had no meaning to him —not at first. He heard the words, but they did not penetrate to his brain. How could they? He was so tired and his brain no longer receptive. For five days and nights he had been anticipating death. Every hour, every moment of those five days and nights he had expected that loose-lipped mouth over there to utter the usual formula: ". . . That you be taken to the place of execution and there . . ." And now and then he had caught himself wondering whether, by way of a final outrage, he would be condemned to be shot in the back. It was a way they had, these minions of the Bonapartes. Not that he cared—oh, no! He had looked death in the face squarely as Pierre had done. He was getting familiarised with the thought. He only hoped that in whichever way death came to him he would meet it as Pierre had done—even though he, Gérard, was innocent. Pierre, being guilty, had chosen to take

the risk. Then now, all of a sudden, when he was nearly spent, those words "granted" and "pardon"—he didn't know what they meant.

M. Toulon went on droning: a lot about His Majesty's nobility of soul and his own persuasive eloquence. But Gérard heard nothing of this. All he heard were the words "granted" and "pardon" whenever they occurred. And after a time they did get right into his brain and remained there. He threw down his cigarette and raised burning, infinitely wearied eyes to that ugly fat face which he so hated, raised them inquiringly, pathetically, for he was so tired and felt so backboneless and stupid. M. Toulon was leaning forward, with one elbow on the desk. His fat ugly face was wreathed in smiles, his small eyes glittered behind the fleshy lids, his podgy hand toyed with the rough beard on his chin. He looked like a tame nanny-goat. Gérard looked on him and frowned. He was feeling physically sick.

"Yes, my dear Vicomte, His Majesty has been so gracious . . ."

"What exactly do you mean?" Gérard contrived at last to speak through his parched lips.

And M. Toulon became more suave than before.

"Only this, my friend," he replied. "That if you will agree to a certain condition imposed on you by His Majesty you will be granted not only your life, but a considerable amount of liberty!"

Life? Liberty? A certain amount . . . ? What did it mean? Surely not . . . ? And Gérard's pale face flushed crimson with indignation.

"You mean a life sentence—in prison?" he cried out. As he received no immediate answer he jumped to his feet. He threw back his head and laughed aloud. He, Gérard de Lanoy, a convict for life!

"I refuse!" he cried hoarsely, "I refuse, do you hear? I refuse life under such conditions. Are you such a drivelling fool to imagine that a Lanoy would spend twenty years in jail?"

But it seems that this was not at all what M. Toulon meant. He put up a podgy hand in protest and showed how benevolent he could be even when he was being called a drivelling fool.

"A Lanoy in jail, my dear young friend?" he protested. "Whoever could suppose such a thing? Did I suggest it? Never in all the world! Do sit down now and listen quietly to me."

But he had his way—the way he aimed at every prisoner; to break a man's self-control and get him worn-out and malleable in his podgy hands. Gérard indeed was no longer calm. Alternative hope and renewed despair had worked their way with him. When

he sat down he was panting. Excitement had got the better of him.

And when M. Toulon put the point-blank question to him. "Do you know what is meant by judicial death?" all he could do was to murmur vaguely "No" in reply.

Whereupon M. Toulon went on to explain:

"A man—like yourself, say—is sentenced to death, to a very shameful death, seeing that traitors, save in a very few cases, are condemned to be shot in the back." Thus began Papa Toulon, speaking now in measured tones with great solemnity, all fatherly benevolence gone from his manner. "To all intents and purposes that sentence is carried out. Friends, relatives, the world in which he moved, mourn his tragic demise. The crime, being one of *lèse-majesté*, his property is confiscated by the State. But sometimes His Majesty deigns to exercise his prerogative of clemency, and the traitor is granted his life under certain conditions. His death remains judicial, but not actual. Now do you understand?"

"Not quite," Gérard still murmured vaguely.

"In your case," M. Toulon went on, "it will mean that Gérard Vicomte de Lanoy will be officially dead, but that you, my young friend, will benefit by His Majesty's clemency. It will mean that outside the territory of France you will be allowed to take up any name and any nationality you choose, begin a new life, in fact, as so many men, even older than you, have done, anywhere and however you please. Have I made myself clear at last?"

And M. Toulon, once more resuming his air of fatherly benignity, folded his fat hands over his paunch and absolutely beamed on his prisoner, very much as an enthusiastic naturalist would beam on a rare butterfly through which he had stuck a pin. Gérard, however, neither moved nor spoke. He seemed to be in a state of semi-consciousness.

When a man—and a young one at that—has looked death straight in the face for several days and nights, trying hard to familiarise himself with the idea that within a certain number of hours he would cease to be, that the world would go on without him, with his friends still laughing, living and loving, while he himself turned to dust in a felon's grave; and when he suddenly sees death turn away from him and life, glorious, radiant life, beckon to him once more, his whole soul will at once tend towards that radiance and be filled with an immensity of ecstasy and joy. That, of course, was Gérard's case. He was a man suddenly wakened from a hideous nightmare, struggling with it still, striving to understand that it was a mere creation of an unconscious brain. And slowly, very slowly, despair as well as fatigue and

irritation gave way to this great, this supreme hope, and to the unconquerable love of life inherent in every one of God's creatures, if they be healthy and young.

Life! Gérard loved life! It had been so kind to him, offered him joys in plenty, sorrow with a sparing hand. Life!

True that during the last few days he had experienced emotions and feelings which had taken away something indescribable from that care-free love of life. Life was still precious, still radiant, but it had become more exacting. It asked something in return for the joy its mere possession gave. And in the midst of resurrected hope there loomed the cloud raised by the Chief Commissary's ominous words: "If you will agree to a certain condition . . ."

Life, then, was demanding a price. What was it? Gérard gathered all his powers of self-control together and looked the fat beast squarely in the face.

"You said just now," he said in a steady voice, "that to this—clemency, there is attached a certain condition. What is it?"

"A very easy one to fulfil, my dear young friend," M. Toulon replied blandly. "As I have explained to you just now, His Majesty offers you complete liberty under a new name outside the territory of France, together with a substantial portion of your confiscated wealth, if you will consent to go through the ceremony of marriage with a lady who must always remain unknown to you."

"Marriage? I? . . ." Gérard exclaimed, puzzled and frowning. "With whom?"

"Have I not said that the lady must remain unknown to you?"

"But I must know . . ."

"What?"

"I must know if the person to whom I give the name of Lanoy —an historic name, M. le Commissaire—is worthy to bear it."

"You will have the Emperor's own word of honour that the lady is in every way worthy to bear your historic name."

"But . . ."

"What does anything else matter, my dear Vicomte," M. Toulon broke in with perfect suavity, "since to-morrow you will be dead?"

Then as Gérard made no comment on this he went on in his habitual smooth and unctuous manner:

"After the ceremony of marriage is performed Gérard Vicomte de Lanoy will have ceased to exist. There will be a widowed Vicomtesse de Lanoy. She will be received at Court as befits her rank; she will move in the highest society, for the Empress herself will chaperon her."

"But my brother . . ." Gérard protested, but involuntarily this

time and more feebly than before, "the Duchesse and . . ."

"To them," M. Toulon replied, "you will be dead—to them as to everyone else."

Gérard allowed his head to drop, his weary eyes to close. Life! Life was so very sweet! At twenty-five and in good health life is so very sweet—even at a price. And M. Toulon's persuasive voice came pleasingly to his ear:

"The world is wide, my dear young friend. There is Belgium, where your grandfather spent many years in the service of a discredited King. There is England, where during our unfortunate Revolution many Frenchmen and women shook the dust of their country from their heels. There is the New World, which our great Lafayette helped to make free."

All this was true. A new life in the New World! Other men had done it—middle-aged men, old men! And life was still very sweet. Life! Freedom! Marriage! Strange that these three should be allied in the condition imposed upon the consent of a doomed man.

"It is easy to choose, is it not, my young friend?" M. Toulon put in persuasively. "Life and freedom on one side of the scales; death and disgrace on the other."

"But marriage . . ." Gérard said almost in a whisper.

"Eh, what?" M. Toulon countered. "Not a marriage at all—a mere ceremony—the giving of a name which, if you refuse, would die anyhow with you to-morrow. M. le Duc de Lanoy is childless, and so . . ."

And Papa Toulon, benevolent and jocose, used his podgy hands to represent a pair of scales, raising one, lowering the other with a slow rhythmic movement.

"Life here," he murmured softly, "death there. At twenty-five it is easy to choose."

Gérard was fascinated by those two hands: the scales of life and death. It rested with him which he would choose. Was he a fool to hesitate? Perhaps! But against this boon of life and freedom there were family, tradition, pride of race, the honour of his name; and on the other—well! on the other, pleading loudly for life and freedom, there was youth.

It was only afterwards, many hours afterwards, that Gérard owned to himself that beside love of life there was another love that weighed down one side of the scales—love of Lorendana. It was all very well for this fat old beast to talk of judicial death. While he, Gérard, lived there would always be Lorendana—thoughts of her, her beautiful hands, the play of her eyes, the

mole above her lip. They could deprive him of his name, of his nationality; he might become a wanderer on the face of the earth, cease to be Gérard de Lanoy and become a nameless vagabond, but they could not wrench out of his mind the memory of Lorendana. While there was life in him there would be hope to see her once more, to guess at the colour of her eyes, to penetrate the subtle mystery that enshrined her like a divinity. Lorendana the divine!

"I accept!" he said in a loud resonant voice, and brought his fist crashing down upon the desk. "I accept! Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," M. Toulon replied, smiling, and his low-pitched voice contrasted strangely with Gérard's excited shout. "And I think your choice is a wise one. Nevertheless, it is my duty to make you understand very clearly what it is you have undertaken so that you do not make this important plunge in the dark."

"What is the use of going on talking?" Gérard retorted excitedly. "For five days and nights I have looked down into hell, and now I see earth smiling at me again. I would be a fool not to accept. I am ready to create a widowed Vicomtesse de Lanoy. Isn't that enough?"

"Quite enough," M. Toulon admitted. "But let me remind you, my impetuous young friend, that the widowed Vicomtesse de Lanoy will be in the eyes of the world the relict of a man who has been shot for high treason. If at any time in the future anyone—be he or she who they may—should receive the slightest inkling that the traitor has actually escaped punishment, then the Imperial Secret Police of France, whose arm is long, remember, will know how to reach him. It will not again be a case of judicial death that time. Gérard de Lanoy will in very truth have met his doom. To-morrow at dawn the Vicomte de Lanoy will be shot for high treason. Should his ghost begin to haunt the territory of France the *Cabinet Secret* will know how to lay it for ever. Now have you got that well in your mind?"

"I have."

"And are you still prepared to agree to the marriage to-day and your judicial death to-morrow?"

Monsieur Toulon had spoken so solemnly that Gérard could not help smiling at that ugly fat face which looked absurdly comical in its sternness. He pulled himself together, however, straightened his shoulders and answered firmly and clearly:

"Yes."

CHAPTER

17

"And all this while, my dear," the Duchesse said to me, "we had not the remotest idea that anything was wrong with Gérard. The last I had seen of him was on the morning after the death of Pierre du Pont-Croix, when I left him in my salon with Cécile, hoping that they would come to some sort of preliminary understanding. Of course, there could be no talk of an official engagement when she was in such deep mourning and so overcome with grief, poor child! But I did hope that common sorrow would bring those two children together and that the wishes of our respective families would soon be fulfilled.

"I have told you of my disappointment. Gérard was very fond of Cécile, but not in the way we all wished. He always was one of those fastidious men who expect everything from a woman: beauty, intellect, all the *je ne sais quoi* which some people call 'charm' and which my poor little Cécile unfortunately lacked.

"On the evening following that disappointing interview my husband received the intimation that the Court would be leaving for Bordeaux the next day, starting in the early morning. Of course, we had to accompany the Emperor and Empress, and for an hour or two after the summons came I was kept busy with my maids, choosing dresses and so on, which I wished packed. At the same time I tried to get in touch with Gérard. Both the Duke and I wished to persuade him to leave Lyons, which must have become so very distasteful to him. Even if he did not care to come with us to Bordeaux we thought it would be so much better if he went back to Paris. He had a beautiful apartment there by the Parc Monceau, and with his own servants and his countless friends he could more easily, we thought, get out of himself and forget the tragic events of Lyons. I always felt the most bitter remorse over his stay in that ill-fated city, for it was I who persuaded him to come with us. The du Pont-Croixs lived there and Gérard, of course, was very fond of Pierre. So he came, thinking also, the dear boy! that he could make it a little less dull for me.

"I sent round three times to his lodgings in the course of the evening. His valet, Armand, had seen or heard nothing of him

since morning when M. le Vicomte started out to visit Mme. la Duchesse. Later on the man called round to explain that no doubt M. le Vicomte would be home presently to change for the evening, and could he give any message. The Duke and I were due to be present at a farewell banquet which the Emperor and Empress were giving to the notabilities of Lyons. I had only bare time to dress, and I am afraid that I gave my poor maids a very bad time. While my hair was being dressed—and those chignons, my dear, took some dressing I assure you—I scribbled a brief note to Gérard, begging him to come and say good-bye as early in the morning as he could, as we would surely be starting before ten o'clock."

All this the dear old lady did not relate to me all of a piece. It was only bit by bit that I learned from her how she filled in the time between her last sight of Gérard and the moment when she became aware of the terrible cataclysm which—as she so often put it—"made a middle-aged woman of me, my dear, all in a moment. With that letter of the beast Toulon in my hand I lost within a few minutes both my youth and my good looks." The latter was, of course, absurd, for a more beautiful woman even in her old age than Fanny de Lanoy I have never seen in all my life.

She was not worried about Gérard either that evening, or during her stay with the Emperor and Empress in Bordeaux. "I was a little bit angry with him," she said, "for not coming to say good-bye. About one hour before we left Lyons, Armand, his valet, came round and told me that M. le Vicomte had not been home all night and had sent no message, so he, Armand, could not be certain when he would return. But even then I did not worry. Gérard was such a *mauvais sujet* that it did not surprise me to hear that he had made a night of it somewhere in the low haunts of Lyons with that young Mérincourt, who was always ready to play Hell and Tommy with anybody. I was only cross and thought no more about it until we were well on the way.

"Oh! that awful railway, my dear. How I hated it! Even to-day I cannot bear sitting in those awful stuffy carriages. An invention of the devil, that's what the railroad is. When I think of the comfort of our elegant roomy barouche, the beautiful leisurely way in which we drove from place to place with plenty of time in which to see the country and appreciate the beauty of the landscape—ah, well! we had plenty of time when I was young, time to enjoy life, to appreciate Art and Nature, time to love!" She sighed, the lovely Duchesse, and her faded old eyes took on that faraway look which I loved to see. They seemed to hold a world of memories in

their depths, memories of youth and happy days, but above all else memories of love.

"I made up my mind," she went on on one occasion, "during that dreary journey, that I would write a long letter to Gérard as soon as I had a moment's leisure in Bordeaux. And I did write the day after our arrival. I begged him to go back to Paris at once and to expect me there within the next few days. I knew the Empress would not stay long in Bordeaux. She had been made very nervous by Pierre du Pont-Croix's attempt on the Emperor's life. She feared for the safety of the Prince Imperial, more especially as during this provincial tour she had come to realise that the Emperor and herself were not as popular as she thought. Though there was plenty of cheering and waving of handkerchiefs, there were also occasionally ominous silences on the part of the crowd when their carriage drove by. And so I, for one, was looking forward to our return to Paris after a very short stay in Bordeaux.

"I wrote to Gérard, commanding him, begging him to be in Paris when we arrived. But when we did arrive there was no sign of him, nor any letter or message. Then I did really begin to feel anxious. It was not like his usual courteous way not to reply to a letter. Four days had elapsed since we left Lyons, two of which we spent in that abominable railway, going from Lyons to Bordeaux and Bordeaux to Paris. We were only two days in Bordeaux. I was dog-tired, and the Duke very bad-tempered. I sent a telegram to Gérard begging for an immediate answer. I got none. I telegraphed to Armand, who sent me back a long reply which must have cost the poor man a great deal of money. I kept that telegram, my dear," the Duchesse said. "You will find it among the papers I gave you."

* * * * *

I have the telegram before me now, the message written out by hand on a flimsy bit of blue paper. The date is illegible; only the word "June" is decipherable. The Vicomte de Lanoy's valet must indeed have spent a lot of money on it. Out of deference for his master's august family he spared neither a "Madame" nor a "Monsieur." He wrote the address out in full:

Madame la Duchesse de Lanoy,
Hotel de Lanoy,
Boulevard Saint Germain,
Paris.

The text still legible is as follows:—

"Armand regrets to inform Madame la Duchesse that he has not set eyes on Monsieur le Vicomte since the day before Madame la Duchesse left Lyons. Monsieur le Vicomte has sent no message to Armand, and no one in Lyons has seen or heard from him. With deep respect,

"ARMAND BEAUVAIS."

Monsieur le Duc spent the next twenty-four hours in interviewing every personage of note in Paris, from the Emperor downwards—the Chief Commissaries of the Secret and of the Municipal Police, the Captain General of the Gendarmerie, the Prime Minister, and I don't know who else. Every one of these great personages—from the Emperor downwards—were extremely amiable and most of them obsequious to M. le Duc de Lanoy, Grand-Marshal of the Emperor, and a personage greater than most. They made all sorts of promises to M. le Duc, swearing that, alas! they did not happen to know anything of the whereabouts of the young Vicomte, but that the whole machinery of the Secret Police would at once be set in motion in order to trace the Vicomte's movements and to restore him to the embrace of his illustrious relatives.

The Duc came home fagged to death with so many comings and goings. He was no longer a very young man, being fifteen years older than his brother. He found his wife on the verge of a nervous collapse, with no news of Gérard and every means exhausted to find traces of him. Twenty-four hours later a messenger came with an official letter addressed to M. le Duc de Lanoy. The letter was signed "Lucien Toulon, Chief Commissary of the Imperial Secret Police." It is one of the most interesting documents in the archives of the Lanoy family, and by its wording, no less than by its actual contents, presents a curious picture of those last remaining years of the Second Empire and of the methods which the Secret Police of the time employed in order to show zeal and loyalty to a tottering cause. This is what M. Toulon wrote to the Duc de Lanoy on the 26th of June, 1868.

"MONSIEUR LE DUC,

"It is with deep sorrow that I have to inform you that your brother Gérard Paul, Vicomte de Lanoy, has after overwhelming evidence and his own written confession been found guilty of high treason against the State and sentenced to death. The sentence was duly executed this morning in the yard of the Military Prison of the Abbaye and his remains interred in the

prison cemetery. Some hours before his death Gérard de Lanoy contracted a marriage with a lady in whom His Majesty the Emperor takes a great personal interest. It was His Majesty himself who desired this marriage, and the Empress deigned to be a witness, by proxy, for the bride. M. Gabriel Prévost was witness for the bridegroom. The ceremony took place in the prison chapel. The register is at M. le Duc's disposal for examination of the signatures to the marriage certificate."

Forty years afterwards when the Duchesse showed me this letter and gave me permission to reproduce it in this chronicle she could not, even after all those years, keep the tears from welling to her eyes. Her grief must have been overwhelming. She was only a young woman at the time—twenty-seven or eight, not more—and her affection for her brother-in-law was one of the most beautiful traits in her character. She had idealised Gérard in every way; she looked upon him as a kind of hero of romance, one who was the embodiment of chivalry and of every other masculine virtue. *"Mon chevalier"* she often called him, and it was she who bought the celebrated picture by Delacroix representing Bayard, *"le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche."* She always had it in her boudoir above her writing-desk because she would have it that it was the image of Gérard. Women of her generation did have ideals like that, and Fanny de Lanoy not only cherished Gérard (I can think of no other word that would express the feeling she had for him), but she believed in his sincere affection for her.

"Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche!" And now this awful, this horrible ending to his young life! And he innocent, of course! How could he be guilty of high treason or any other crime? How dared that disgusting, sycophantic Toulon talk of overwhelming evidence? It was not true! It was not true! As for a "written confession," it was a forgery, or else . . . Fanny de Lanoy's senses reeled at the thought . . . or else torture—mental torture that had wrung a so-called confession. Oh, she knew! She knew their hellish methods. Toulon, Prévost and Company, obsequious, self-seeking varlets, who had sold their souls to the devil in exchange for promotion and a miserable pittance!

"My dear," she would say to me whenever she could bring herself to talk of that awful day, "how I ever survived the shock I don't know. You see, I had never thought of Gérard getting mixed up in all those political intrigues. He was loyal to our King, of course, as all men and women of our caste were in those days, but he was too fine, too straight to go into corners and hatch impos-

sible plots—let alone assassinations—like poor Pierre du Pont-Croix did to his cost. So, of course, I had not the remotest inkling of anything—and then suddenly this terrible cataclysm. I tried to pull myself together, for I never was a woman to collapse under a blow. But my God! what I suffered. It was hell, my dear! I assure you."

I ventured to put in a word about the other part of the Chief Commissary's letter, the part relating to the Vicomte's marriage with "a lady" (as he put it) "in whom His Majesty the Emperor takes a great personal interest." The dear old Duchesse smiled—it was a sad little smile—and she said: "As a matter of fact, *chérie*, at the time I could think of nothing but Gérard lying stiff and stark, riddled with shot, in a felon's grave. It was such a horrible thought, so overwhelming, that it just swamped everything else. But *Le bon Dieu* did deal me two terrible blows, you must admit. One of them would have been enough to make an old woman of me. No, no, don't laugh! I assure you that on that awful day with that letter in my hand, all my youth, my joy of life suddenly left me, and neither ever came back—not altogether. I was a happy young thing before then. Of course, my life was rather a monotonous one with that perpetual round of official galas and receptions and what not, and an everlasting restraint on one's impulses and emotions, everything regulated by etiquette. And you know, dear, my husband, though he was invariably kind and courteous and generous, was not exactly—what shall I call it?—ardent. But all the same, I was happy. A great deal of my happiness came through Gérard. Ours was a perfect friendship. We understood one another thoroughly, and he was a delightful talker. We discussed books, pictures, music by the hour. He was a great friend of young Dumas and Octave Feuillet, of Meissonier and Puvis de Chavannes—he knew Offenbach intimately, and of course Schneider and Cora Pearl—the stars of the half-world as well as of his own, and he used to bring me all the gossip of that delightful Bohemian circle which was closed to people like ourselves.

"Well, with that letter of that devil Toulon in my hand I realised in a moment that here was the end of all those happy times, of our intimate causeries together and of perfect sympathy with a fellow man. And then when the thought of that clandestine marriage finally got into my brain I endured the tortures of the damned all over again. You see, I thought that Gérard had been deceiving me for I knew not how long. I thought that he had been in love with this person, whoever she was, and said nothing

to me about it. To me, his intimate friend! I couldn't bear the thought. And to hear the Duke talking about it in a matter-of-fact way from the worldly point of view was absolute torture.

"My husband's theory was that Gérard had been in love with the woman for some time and had intended to marry her in the near future; in fact that he had been so much in love that he wished to endow her with his name before he died. As for the woman herself, she, no doubt, had Bonaparte blood in her veins, and as Gérard's fortune would be confiscated by the State under the law relating to high treason, the Emperor himself would provide handsomely for her. Anyhow, the marriage had the Imperial seal of approval evidently, and all we could do in the matter was to steel ourselves into preparing to meet our widowed sister-in-law with as much cordiality as the Emperor could wish.

"I suppose you think it strange that in our conjectures we didn't get anywhere near the truth—neither the Duke nor I ever guessed at what had actually happened. And I may as well tell you that the Duke never did know the whole truth. I suppose that we, neither of us, had sufficient imagination—not like you fiction authors. And the truth, my dear, as I learned it later from Gérard's own lips, was so immeasurably distant from our usual humdrum existence that I, for one, never made as much as a guess at it.

"All I had been told by that beast Toulon was that my *'chevalier sans peur et sans reproche'* had been sent to a shameful death by miserable intriguing assassins, and that he had been inveigled into marriage by the witchery of some woman who was unknown to me. Those were the two facts, my dear, which on that awful day of June suddenly made an old woman of me."

CHAPTER 18

And in the meanwhile there had befallen a chapter in Gérard de Lanoy's life more strange and wonderful than anything that had ever occurred in any man's life before. That the true facts of the case were altogether different to anything even Fanny de Lanoy, with her sensitive affection for him, could possibly imagine, only came out later, bit by bit. I don't suppose that he himself could

have told you at the time, in sequence and coherently, just what did happen.

No doubt the last ten days had made a different man of him. From the moment when he stood at the corner of the Place Bellecour and saw Pierre at the window with a pistol in his hand, ready to take aim at the Emperor's carriage, he became a different man; and the last five days in Toulon's torture-chamber had completed the change. The healthy, care-free young animal had become a man who had endured sorrow and pain, and who had drunk a deep draught in the cup of love. And the marks which these had left on a sensitive temperament were deep and were destined to remain always.

After his last interview with M. Toulon, Gérard was taken back to his cell. He threw himself down on the narrow truckle bed and in a few minutes was fast asleep. He was completely exhausted, bodily and mentally. He slept for hours, dreamlessly, like a log. Nobody disturbed him and it was the first long sleep he had had for over a week. In the late afternoon a warder brought him a daintily cooked supper on a tray—lamb cutlet, fresh young peas, fruit and a pint of champagne. There was a visiting card on the tray with M. Toulon's name on it and the genial words, "*Bon appétit.*" Gérard realised that he was hungry. He ate with a relish and enjoyed the champagne. Strangely enough, he was feeling at peace with himself. It was the reaction probably after being on the rack for five days. Also ten hours' solid sleep had put new life into him.

Anyway, now that he was fully awake and rested he was not conscious either of remorse or regret. He did not regret his bargain. He was young and had purchased life at a price. Well, it rested with him to make something of that new life that would be worth while. At any rate, now that it was all over, the bargain concluded, his word given, he would not allow his thoughts to run riot in his brain. This was the time for self-control and keeping one's mind clear and one's nerves taut. No good thinking now of exquisite Fanny and dear little Cécile—or of Lorendana!

Lorendana! Oh, my God! If only it were humanly possible not to think of her!

• • • • •

Later on towards evening two warders came to fetch Gérard. He looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock and the shades of evening were drawing in. A polite little note from M. Toulon informed M. le Vicomte de Lanoy that the marriage ceremony

would take place at nine o'clock in the Sainte Chapelle. This was by special dispensation from the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris who, owing to the urgency of the occasion, permitted the religious ceremony to be performed without the preliminary Mass.

The urgency of the occasion! The marriage ceremony! Gérard had almost forgotten this part of his bargain. He had thought of life—the new life in a new world—he had forgotten about the wedding. Anyway, while he slept someone had brushed and pressed his clothes and cleaned his shoes, and a set of fine new linen, obviously bought at one of the most expensive shops in Paris, was there ready for him to put on.

When he was dressed he was conducted along endless and intricate passages to one of the side entrances of the Conciergerie. Here a smart coupé, with a coachman in livery on the box, stood waiting. When Gérard stepped out into the open he took a long breath and filled his lungs with the pure evening air—the first heavenly draught he had tasted for more than five days. It was one of those gorgeous midsummer evenings of which Paris seems to hold the secret. The air was like champagne, and from the trees in the great parks and new boulevards there came the scent of young verdure and of buds newly burst into leaf. One or two bright-eyed little midinettes in unfashionable clothes, tripping homewards from their work, cast quick, inquisitive glances on the handsome young man with the pale face and sad-looking eyes. At this hour a hush seemed to lie over the great city, only from the Boul' Miche close by there came at intervals the clip-clap of hoofs and rumble of wheels of a belated voiture, and from farther away the booming of the bells of Notre Dame striking the hour.

Nine o'clock.

A man, in tightly buttoned frock-coat and wearing a silk hat, stepped out of the coupé and, taking off his hat, bowed ceremoniously to Gérard. It was M. Gabriel Prévost, second in command to M. Toulon.

"If M. le Vicomte will give himself the trouble," he said, and stood aside to allow Gérard to step into the coupé.

The drive round to the Sainte Chapelle only took a minute or two. Gérard, sitting beside M. Prévost and driving to his own wedding, wanted to pinch his own arm to ascertain if he was really awake. M. Prévost remarked on the beauty of the weather, but feared that there was a prospect of rain in the night. A thunderstorm probably. When the coupé came to a halt at the gates of the Saint Chapelle, he stepped out and with meticulous courtesy stood at the carriage door while Gérard alighted.

Never had that exquisite Sainte Chapelle appeared more beautiful than it did at this hour, its delicate tracery silhouetted against the evening sky in which the last glow of sunset still lingered in delicate tones of gold—as if loth to fade into the embrace of the night. But frankly, Gérard had no eyes for artistic beauty just then. I doubt if he saw anything at all. He passed through the swing-door into what seemed absolute darkness, for there was no light at this end of the church. The place felt close and chilly after the balmy outside air, and the smell of stale incense struck unpleasantly on his nostrils.

A sudden chill crept up Gérard's spine; his hands felt as cold as ice, even though his temples were throbbing and beads of moisture rose at the roots of his hair. He followed M. Prévost up the aisle. The beautiful high altar was decorated with flowers and lighted candles, which glowed like small golden stars out of the surrounding gloom. A bald-headed old priest, wearing canonicals, was kneeling on the altar-steps, muttering his Latin orisons. An acolyte in red cassock and lace-edged surplice knelt beside him. A couple of prie-Dieux upholstered in red velvet were set in front of the altar-rails. Everything, then, was ready for this strangest of all wedding ceremonies.

Gérard stood by the rails with M. Prévost at his elbow. The silence after a time became oppressive. It was only broken by the mutterings of the priest when his voice rose above a whisper. A sense of unreality took possession of Gérard's mind. The dark church, the murmurs of the priest, the scent of stale incense and of hot-house flowers, the flickering of the wax candles, all these things did not seem to belong to actuality; they were not a part and parcel of everyday life. After the first few minutes Gérard had the feeling that he had become a soulless automaton, that he was being moved by giant hands that wielded strings attached to his lifeless body. All his senses were in a state of torpor.

Time went on. Nothing happened. A church clock in the distance struck the half-hour. M. Prévost, after uttering an exclamation of impatience, melted away into the darkness. After a minute or two Gérard caught sight of him again. He had beckoned to the priest who came down to the rails to speak with him. Gérard heard them talking together in an undertone. They said something about "very late" and "M. le Colonel" and "ladies at their toilet." The priest asked "Has she far to come?" and M. Prévost replied: "No, from the Place St. Roch, that is all. Hôtel d'Egypte —a short drive. His Majesty was sending a carriage . . . I cannot understand . . ."

It all was quite unreal and weird. The priest went back to his orisons and M. Prévost once more took up his stand at Gérard's elbow. And again the minutes sped on.

However, after a time there was a commotion at the west end of the church. Gérard turned automatically to see what it was and, in a dream-like state, he saw that it was the bridal procession coming up the aisle. Out of the gloom it came. Half a dozen forms walking two by two. Shadows that gradually took shape and colour.

The procession was headed by the usher in gorgeous tunic and cloak with his tall staff of office—all in the regulation manner pertaining to Society weddings. Behind the usher came the bride on the arm of an old man who wore the full dress uniform of the Imperial Guard. He had long, snow-white whiskers, small Imperial and a shaven chin. The bride, in a long dark cloak and hood, was leaning on his arm.

The bride!

Of course, nothing was real and he, Gérard de Lanoy, was not here at all, but, nevertheless, SHE was here coming up the unreal aisle of an unreal church—a ghost, a wraith or creature of a fevered fancy, in a dark hood and cape that completely hid her face and form. Gérard—in his dream—thought that she looked like a bell. The fashionable crinoline gave every woman that appearance, and in this case specially so because of the hood which ended in a point at the top.

The bride!

While she walked slowly up the aisle and came like a shadow out of the gloom, Gérard—in his dream—realised for the first time that he had never until this moment thought of her as a woman—as a human being possessing a soul, an entity of its own. He had never before speculated in his mind whether she was a freely consenting party to this mock ceremony, or had she been forced into it by some love-tragedy which, but for this, would have ended in disgrace? Such things did happen in the world. Not quite like this, it is true, not quite under such strange and weird conditions, but still they did happen, and Gérard caught himself wondering—all in a dream state of course—but he did at the same time register in his mind a determination to think it all out presently when he was once more awake and had once again become a real, live human being.

She, the woman, was now quite close to him. He noted even in his dream how beautifully she moved and with what dignity she held herself, with the upper part of her body slightly leaning back,

as women had to do in order to balance the weight of their egregious crinolines. Funny she should have worn such a huge one on this solemn occasion, but it certainly did not impede her movements, nor detract from the perfect grace with which at a sign from the priest she presently knelt down on one of the prie-Dieux. Gérard knelt down beside her. The bewhiskered gentleman in uniform stood by the side of her and M. Prévost remained as before, dignified and almost motionless at Gérard's elbow.

What followed was even more absolutely unreal than what had gone before. Gérard supposed that he was being married to this bell-shaped wraith beside him, but he really didn't know. Certain it is that the old priest came down to the altar-rails, followed by his server, and that he stood there for a time mumbling words, some in Latin, some in French, and put questions to Gérard to which he gave the responses which were prompted to him by M. Prévost. At one moment he said, "I will." After which he caught himself listening intently for the sound of the woman's voice when she in her turn would be asked the liturgical question and in her turn would have to answer, "I will!" But she gave the answer in such a low undertone that Gérard heard nothing at all. Nor did he once catch the sound of her name, which the priest must have spoken at least once during the service.

But presently something happened which, though it made things no less unreal, did in a moment alter the whole complexion of Gérard's dream-like state.

The acolyte held in his two hands a small velvet cushion, and on this cushion there was a ring. At a sign from the priest and prompted by M. Prévost, Gérard picked up the ring. The priest murmured a few words, whereupon she—the woman, the mysterious, nameless bride—put out her hand. Once more, prompted by M. Prévost, Gérard repeated the words murmured by the priest:

"With this ring I thee wed . . ." and taking hold of the outstretched hand he slipped the ring upon its fourth finger.

And then, of course, he knew. And what's more he knew that he had known it all along. From the moment that the tall, graceful form came out of the gloom, became detached and colourful, from that moment he had known that SHE the mystic bride, was his soul-mate, Lorandana, the divine.

It still was all a dream, a mysterious unreality! He, Gérard de Lanoy, was not actually standing there, holding that hand—the most perfect, the most exquisite hand in all the world—one he would have known among myriads of others. He was not

actually standing there, giving his name, plighting his troth to the one woman in the whole world to whom he had already consecrated his soul. It was unreal. The light that suddenly dispelled the darkness around him and threw a radiance upon her was not a real light! It was only a part of his dream! But oh, heavens above! what an exquisite dream from which, please God, there should be no awakening. He had felt that perfect hand give a slight tremor, something like the fluttering of a captive bird when his own hand had instinctively closed over it, and had tried to convey by this one brief pressure something of that overwhelming tenderness which, at contact with her, had surged through his entire being. When she withdrew her hand darkness surrounded him again. But now it was darkness that only concealed the light, but did not altogether dispel it. He felt her nearness even though he no longer touched her hand.

Presently the service was over. The priest spoke a few more words to the bridal pair and then went back to the altar-steps, where he knelt down and resumed his interrupted orisons. In the meanwhile the bridal procession was re-formed and this time Gérard, prompted by M. Prévost, offered his arm to the bride. They walked together, preceded by the usher. Her hand was on his arm. Her hand! and she was his wife! Before God and man she was his wife, even though he was under sentence of death if he ever dared to approach her, if ever he ventured so far as to give her the merest inkling that he was only judicially dead. But she was his wife nevertheless! His widow before the world, but before God his wife. In the years that were to come, in the dreary, desolate future, he could think of her as his wife! His wife before God!

They went into the vestry and the small crowd followed them in. The room was small and dark, a couple of wax candles in tall sconces were set upon a desk, an oil-lamp hung from the ceiling and threw a yellow circle of light around. But to Gérard it seemed as if a wondrous light was irradiated from the tall, bell-shaped form of his bride. He had the feeling that everything around him was dark, impenetrably dark. Everything save that one form in dark cloak and hood which irradiated light. And at one time he even had the feeling that that light was so dazzling that he was forced to close his eyes or it would have blinded him.

It was a curious feeling, one that could only come in a dream state. When he opened his eyes again the light had gone. Lorendana was no longer by his side, her hand no longer rested on his arm. Everything now was dark—impenetrably dark. He w[illegible]ed

up to the desk, a pen was thrust into his hand, and he was told to sign his name in a book. He moved and did as he was told just like an automaton. Subconsciously he looked about him, looked for that radiant light which in the years to come would illumine his life, but all was darkness now. He could not see her. She had gone away.

Like an automaton subconsciously he allowed himself to be led away. He didn't know whither they were taking him, neither did he care. Darkness encompassed him. His dream had come to an end.

CHAPTER 19

Reality in the shape of M. Toulon's voice brought Gérard back with a jerk to full consciousness He was sitting in that bare, ugly room which he had been wont to think of as the torture-chamber, and M. Toulon, fat, benevolent, his monocle in his eye, was beaming at him across his desk.

"Well, now, my dear Vicomte," he was saying in that suave oily voice of his, at the moment when Gérard became fully conscious of himself, "I have still the pleasant task of placing in your hands what most men, even of your past social standing, would think a considerable fortune."

He paused a moment and his podgy hands fumbled for a time with the papers which, as usual, littered his desk. Perhaps he wanted certain words of his to sink deeply into Gérard's mind—"your past social standing," and he had emphasised the word "past."

Gérard waited on in silence, and after a few seconds M. Toulon resumed.

"This fortune, granted to you by exceptional clemency on the part of His Majesty the Emperor, is derived from the probable price—or rather part of the price—which your real and personal estate will fetch in the open market when your assets are eventually realised. When you remember that everything you possess is forfeit to the State through your crime of high treason you will, I hope, appreciate the liberality of which you are the recipient. I may add that the widowed Vicomtesse de Lanoy will benefit not

only by the residue of your private fortune after the sale of your estates, but by a very large jointure which His Majesty has graciously granted her out of his privy purse. So you need have no anxiety on the score that Madame la Vicomtesse might not be able to take her place in society in accordance with her rank."

M. Toulon cleared his throat. He was accustomed to express himself in chosen words and elaborate phraseology, but the points which he desired to make in this instance did almost tax his usually fluent eloquence. Gérard never said a word. He sat quite still, with one forearm resting on the desk, his fingers intertwined, his eyes fixed on that fat, unctuous face which he loathed and hated more than anything else in the world.

"Well, now," M. Toulon resumed once more after a short interval of silence, "what I propose to give you are letters of credit to banks in London, New York, Berlin and Vienna. If you have other plans in your mind you can tell me here and now, and I can arrange for you to pick up your money wherever you think would be most convenient to yourself. These letters of credit represent two million francs in gold. As I said just now, many young gentlemen of your *monde* would envy you such a fortune. You are, of course, at liberty to dispose of it in any manner or way you wish. I am quite aware that your estate will fetch more than double that amount even in the open market, but as I have had the privilege of explaining to you, the residue will be placed as soon as possible at the disposal of Mme. la Vicomtesse de Lanoy."

With a broad, unctuous smile M. Toulon now held out three or four official-looking papers to Gérard. Then he said, pointing to these with his short, podgy finger:

"There remains the question of your name, my dear and—may I say?—lucky young friend. Will you sign there at the bottom—I have indicated the place with a cross in pencil—whatever name you decide to adopt for the future? I will then complete the arrangements with London, New York, Berlin, Vienna and, as I said, any other city you choose to name."

Gérard took the papers. They were the usual letters of credit on the Franco-Swiss Bank, which had branches in almost every capital city in Europe. He reflected for a second or two, then signed each letter and handed the papers back to M. Toulon.

Monsieur Toulon glanced at the signatures.

"Paul Gérard?" he questioned. Gérard nodded. M. Toulon pursed his lips. "Rather like your defunct name Gérard Paul de Lanoy, what?" A pause; then he went on with a light shrug: "No

matter, no matter! Paul Gérard it is, and Paul Gérard it shall remain as far as our department is concerned."

He slipped the signed letters into a drawer of his desk; then he took up the duplicate forms, filled in dates and amounts and handed these to Gérard. He then rose and, with a benign smile, intimated that the interview was coming to an end. Gérard also rose and stood silently for a few moments waiting for that final unctuous admonition which he knew would not be spared him. It came from those loose, fleshy lips with solemn pompousness:

"All I need do now, my friend," M. Toulon said in conclusion, "is to remind you, once more and for the last time, that Gérard Vicomte de Lanoy is dead. Should Paul Gérard ever set foot on French territory, or should anyone ever receive the slightest inkling that he is in fact the Vicomte de Lanoy, at once his life will be forfeit and death sure and immediate will overtake him wherever he may be."

Gérard had not spoken a single word since first he entered M. Toulon's office. He didn't speak now. All he did was to look the fat beast straight in the face for a second or two. M. Toulon allowed his monocle to drop out of his eye; he cleared his throat and fidgeted with the papers on his desk. There was something in the other man's straight glance which he did not care to meet.

Then after a long while Gérard said:

"Can I go now?"

"In a moment," M. Toulon rejoined pleasantly, and drew a deep breath of satisfaction—it almost seemed one of relief. "In a moment. First let me give you this," he went on, and held a well-filled wallet out to Gérard. "A few thousand francs for your immediate requirements, before you have the opportunity of drawing on your letters of credit. You need not hesitate," he added with an indulgent smile, seeing that Gérard did not immediately take the wallet from him; "the money doesn't come from me."

Then, as Gérard finally took the wallet and slipped it into his coat pocket, M. Toulon fell back once more into dry, business-like tones:

"There is a train for Belfort at 7.15 to-morrow morning, and the express for Brussels leaves at 7.40. Both from the Gare du Nord. Which do you wish to take?"

"I'll go to Brussels," Gérard replied equally dryly.

"In that case," M. Toulon resumed, "you will report yourself at Feignies, the Belgian frontier, immediately on your arrival there. The Bureau of our Chief Commissary of Police is on our side of the frontier. Anyone will show you where it is. For your

own safety's sake," he added impressively, "I advise you not to delay this formality. Is there anything else you wish to say or to ask?"

"Where am I to spend the night?" Gérard asked.

"Your past quarters here are still at your disposal."

Gérard gave an involuntary shudder.

"And there's always the waiting-room at the Gare du Nord."

"I should prefer the waiting-room."

"I thought you would," Papa Toulon rejoined with his most benevolent smile. "I have two men here who will accompany you to the station, and in the morning see you into your train. Is there anything else?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then all I can do is to wish you *bon-voyage*," M. Toulon concluded dryly. He readjusted the monocle in his eye and sat down again. He touched the handbell. Two warders came in and conducted Gérard out of the room. Just as he was passing through the door he heard M. Toulon's smooth voice saying:

"Don't forget Feignies."

The interview was over.

The new life had begun.

CHAPTER

20

The station clock was striking eleven at the very moment when the coupé in which Gérard had been driven up to the Gare du Nord drew up. At this hour of the night the station was in semi-darkness and completely deserted. The times of night journeys, of Pullman cars and *wagons-lits* were not yet, and the last trains for Calais or Belfort or Havre had gone long since. The two plain-clothes men who accompanied Gérard went to the first-class waiting-room with him. It was already closed for the night, but one of the men went in search of an official, who promptly ordered it to be reopened and the lights turned on.

Like all station waiting-rooms, it was fusty and airless in the extreme; it smelt of new paint and new leather, of varnish, of coal-dust and of gas. Everything was still new but already covered with dirt. The seats all round the wall looked forbidding in their

hideousness. How could a tired body woo sleep on that creaking, shiny upholstery? But to all that, to every kind of discomfort and every sort of weariness, Gérard was by now completely indifferent. He was no more conscious of his body here than he had been in the murky Sainte-Chapelle beside that dark, bell-shaped wraith who was now his wife. He was vaguely conscious of the two men talking together in whispers; of one of them making some facetious remark about "a downy bed" and "pleasant dreams"; then of that man going away and the other seeing him to the door and bidding him good-bye; and then coming back into the room.

He said something to Gérard about making oneself as comfortable as possible in this *sacré* hole. He then turned down the gas, murmured a perfunctory "good night," and finally stretched himself out full length on a seat in one corner of the room and composed himself to sleep.

Gérard started pacing up and down the room, then out of consideration for his companion in misfortune he sat down. He was very, very tired. His eyes and head ached furiously. He stretched out his legs, thrust his hands in his pockets and leaned his head against the hard back of the seat. He closed his eyes. The semi-darkness was comforting, but the atmosphere of this awful waiting-room was certainly not restful. He fell to thinking things over —the present and the future.

For the moment he had no luggage, no clothes save those he stood up in, but he had plenty of money in his pocket—his own money graciously conceded to him by the authorities who had stolen his goods and decreed his judicial assassination. Thus he would begin his new life in brand-new clothes. To-morrow—a few hours hence—he would have turned his back on the country of his birth, never to set foot on it again. Once past the frontier, the whole world, with the exception of his native land, would be open to him.

The whole world! And in that world, with its bustling, jostling crowd of humanity, he would be as much alone as he was in this dank, evil-smelling station waiting-room. It would be a world in which he had neither kith nor kindred, one in which he would have no friends, no ties, no obligations of any sort or kind, no responsibilities save toward himself.

He himself! All alone in this new world. He, the most gregarious of God's creatures, hitherto surrounded by friends, some of whom were very dear, would in this new life be entirely alone. There would be no one with whom he could talk over the past,

exchange reminiscences and intimacies. The words, "Do you remember?" would be erased from his lexicon during the whole length of this new life.

He himself! And all alone!

He thought of Fanny, the adorable friend; of little Cécile, with whom he had so much in common; of all those others who would mourn for him for nine days—or less!—and then forget all about him.

"Gérard de Lanoy? . . . Ah, yes! Poor fellow! Very sad! Let me see, what exactly did happen to him?"

And soon, very soon, his own small world would erase his name from its tablets of memory. Fanny and Cécile would remember him the longest, but even they would forget in time. Time was such a wonderful healer, and it had such swift and powerful wings.

And he too, he supposed, would forget in time. At any rate, memory would become dim. Paris, the receptions, dinner-parties, the opera, the race meetings, at all of which society functions Gérard de Lanoy had been such a conspicuous figure, would very soon seem nothing but a series of dreams. Gérard de Lanoy was already dead. Paul Gérard, an unknown man, had come to life in his stead.

Well! There were a great many things this Paul Gérard could do with his new life. There was philanthropy, the pursuit of science, of literature or the arts. Gérard Vicomte de Lanoy had been something of a wastrel; he had left no mark in the history book of his country, or even in the family archives of the Lanoys; but Paul Gérard would have a fresh page on which to write the story of how he came to live and what he did with his life. Yes, there was much that a man could do, who had youth and health and physical strength . . . if it were not for that awful loneliness.

* * * * *

Something caused him to open his eyes. The fustiness of the room, the smell of dirt and of gas, made the very hope of sleep futile. If only he had thought of borrowing, buying or begging for a book, a newspaper, anything that might have helped him to kill time. He looked about him in utter weariness of mind and body. At the farther end of the room the other man was fast asleep—breathing heavily. On a marble console against the wall, a litter of papers, pamphlets, what-not, attracted Gérard's attention. He was so bored, so tired and so stiff that automatically he struggled to his feet, went across to the console and turned the

papers over, hoping perhaps to find something amusing to read. But the litter consisted of advertisements—some plain, some coloured—of railway excursions, of sellers, of commodities, cards and tariffs of hotels. Hotels! Provincial hotels—Lyons! Bordeaux! Paris hotels—Le Continental! Les Pyramides! L'Hôtel Crillon! L'Hôtel Meurice! L'Hôtel d'Egypte!

L'Hôtel d'Egypte! Gérard held the card in his hand and stared down on it—and stared—unseeing at first, but always at the words "Hôtel d'Egypte." For some reason or other there was something in those two words which roused a dormant memory in his brain and caused a nerve-string to vibrate like a bell. Once or twice he passed his hand across his forehead, trying to remember. Trying. And suddenly it all came back to him. The Sainte-Chapelle. The darkness. The waiting at the rails. The old priest. M. Prévost's impatience and his words: "The Hôtel d'Egypte . . . Place St. Roch . . . a short drive . . ."

The Hôtel d'Egypte! Perhaps he, Gérard, was a fool to jump at conclusions. But wasn't it logical? They were waiting for the bride —the bride was late, though the Hôtel d'Egypte was not very far. Wasn't it logical? A possibility? A possibility for which it was worth while risking—what? A life? Why not? When life was worth so little . . .

The other man was asleep. Gérard picked up his hat and tiptoed to the door. It was not locked. He slipped out into the huge deserted hall. A couple of flickering gas-jets threw a feeble light immediately round them and below, leaving the rest of the place in semi-darkness. A man in blouse and peaked cap was sitting on a trolley munching bits of things which he took out of a paper parcel. Behind the glass screen of a small lodge labelled "Renseignements" a man sat at a bureau writing. The man on the trolley looked up as Gérard crossed the hall. Gérard called out "Bonne nuit!" in a loud, pleasant voice, and passed out, unchallenged, into the open.

The Place outside the station was gay with illuminated cafés, people sitting about under the awnings, passers-by walking to and fro. There were no cabs about, which was unfortunate. Gérard started to walk. He crossed the Place and forced himself to saunter past the cafés and to mix with the crowd, as a man would who had nothing on his mind. Dressed in dark clothes, which after the wear and tear of the past few days had lost some of their pristine elegance, he attracted no notice.

Presently he turned boldly into the long Rue Lafayette. He made superhuman efforts to control his impatience—not to break

into a run. He went with his life in his hands now, for there was never any knowing where spies of M. Toulon's secret police might be lurking. At any moment he might be recognised, and that, of course, would be the end. There would be no question of a mere judicial death again. Even as it was he did not suppose for a moment that his life was worth a centime's purchase. M. Toulon and his gang meant to have him—the sooner the better, probably. Now that he had fulfilled the imposed condition he certainly would be considered more useful dead than alive. But he didn't really care. Not at this hour when he was on his way to the Hôtel d'Egypte. So long as he got there unseen, that was all.

Midway up the interminably long street he spied a cab come clip-clopping down; the light from a lamp-post caught the reflection of the driver's shiny black top-hat. Gérard hailed him. The man, half asleep on his box, took no notice. He was on his way home and not looking out for a fare. But the old nag, so thought Gérard, would cover the distance to the Hôtel d'Egypte in half the time that his own legs would carry him; so when the driver showed no sign of pulling up, Gérard seized the horse by the bridle.

"Hôtel d'Egypte—Place St. Roch," he commanded, and before the man could mumble a protest he added: "Twenty francs *pourboire*."

That settled it. Gérard stepped into the cab, the driver whipped up his horse, and the tired old nag went clip-clopping up the street, back in the direction of the boulevards.

CHAPTER

21

The boulevards looked very gay, and were still crowded. The theatres were just about over, and the throng poured out of them in dense masses, ready to snatch another hour or two of enjoyment out of this beautiful summer evening. Gérard looked on the crowd with envy through the window of the jolting cab. He was conscious suddenly of a passionate longing to become a part of it again, to *flâner* with it along the gaily lighted boulevards, to meet friends, acquaintances, shake hands, exchange bits of gossip, feel

the swish of petticoats against him as he walked, to hear the laughter of midinettes and endure their chaff. He wanted to sit at his favourite table under the awning of the Café Anglais and sip his *Fine* in company with de Neuvic or Méricourt. He longed, in fact, to be one of that essentially Parisian crowd which cannot be found in any other city in the world, and which can only be described by the French word "*flâneurs.*" You cannot "*flâner*" in any other city like you can in Paris. Everywhere else you will be jostled and pushed and harassed by a busy throng which is always in a hurry; but in Paris you can take half an hour to walk half a mile, and never once will you be elbowed out of the way by someone in a greater hurry than yourself.

As Gérard watched the *flâneurs* on the boulevards almost was he tempted to jump out of the cab and to join in with them. In the crowd he spied one or two familiar faces: there was old Général Millecamp, the *vieux marcheur,* his whiskers dyed jet-black at the beginning of each week, now turning green and mauve as Saturday came along; eyeing the midinettes with a smirk on his old lips, the monocle fixed in his eye, his top-hat slightly tilted to the left. And there, *la belle* Emma, in bright green striped casaque, a Fanchon bonnet perched on the top of her huge *coiffure,* a good coating of white and rouge fighting the ravages of time; and Armand de Pratisse still very attentive to her, still faithful despite the fortune he dissipated to meet her extravagance. And there, Octave Feuillet, the novelist *à la mode,* on the look-out for "copy" while drinking his "*mazagran*"; and the leonine painter, Bonard, with his favourite model in tow.

The cab had to slow down while passing through that throng. Snatches of conversation reached Gérard's ear:

"Shocking, I call it! . . ."

"Did you see her in 'Barbe Bleue'? . . ."

"My dear! He paid a million for those pearls . . ."

"With frills all round and two volants . . ."

High-pitched voices, low-toned murmurs, laughter, curses, greetings, farewells; the latest play, the newest mode, the newest star on fashion's firmament. Strange that he, Gérard, would never again join in that gay, irresponsible chatter, would never again care whether women wore crinolines or discarded them; whether their chignons were false or their own hair, or how many millions Cora Pearl was still likely to squander. Luckily before the temptation to jump down and to throw himself just once more into the middle of it all proved too strong, the cab turned into a side-street and the gay life of the boulevards was blotted out of his sight.

He looked at his watch; it was close on midnight. A few minutes later he stepped out of the cab outside the Hôtel d'Egypte.

* * * * *

The hotel was one of those small, semi-private ones which abound in Paris for the special use of clients who desire to escape the attention of their friends. The very approach of the Hôtel d'Egypte suggested discretion and exclusiveness; foreign potentates on a visit to the great Exhibition last year had used it as a *pied-à-terre*. It looked discreet—feebly lighted by rose-shaded wax candles. No suggestion of gas or other new-fangled vulgarities; no hall-porters rushing out to usher clients into the hall. Luggage and other hideousness of hotel-life carefully hidden out of sight. The hall was furnished in exquisite taste in "Style Louis XV," with brocade upholstery and Aubusson carpet. The reception clerk who advanced to meet Gérard was a model of elegance, both in manner and appearance. His frock-coat was perfectly tailored, his waistcoat not more fanciful than good taste permitted; his varnished shoes, his nankeen trousers, his mutton-chop whiskers, his curly hair, were just right in accordance with the dictates of fashion.

"What did Monsieur desire?"

"A room for the night."

A slight, very slight lifting of the eyebrows indicated the pain which this elegant gentleman felt at having no accommodation in the hotel for so exalted a customer. But Gérard knew his Paris better than most. Even before the eyebrows came down again he had hastened to add:

"I come from Bordeaux. I left my luggage at the station, but I'll pay in advance for the room, of course."

The "of course" put everything on a pleasant footing. The elegant gentleman retired behind his mahogany desk and consulted a huge ledger. Gérard put a hundred-franc note down on the ledge of the desk, and the elegant gentleman called to the night porter.

"Conduct Monsieur to No. 25."

He picked up the hundred-franc note and asked suavely if Monsieur desired his change now.

"The room is fifty francs," he said in a discreet whisper.

Gérard expressed no wish to have his change now, whereupon the elegant gentleman thrust a printed form under his nose and a pen into his hand. It was the usual form which the police require every new-comer in the city to fill in on arrival. Gérard wrote a

fancy name in a disguised hand: "Amédé Huron, negociant de Bordeaux." What did it matter? He would be gone again in a few hours if he was lucky; and if M. Toulon's police spotted him, then of course it would be the end of everything. So what did anything matter? The elegant gentleman having put away a hundred francs for a fifty-franc room certainly didn't care. Gérard, in the act of handing pen and form back to him, said carelessly:

"A cousin of mine, a lady, recommended this hotel to me. She is staying here now—la Vicomtesse de Lanoy."

"But yes, Monsieur," the clerk replied. "Madame la Vicomtesse arrived from Lyons this afternoon. She is spending a day or two in Paris."

"I hope you had a nice room for her."

"Oh, Monsieur," the clerk protested with a smirk, "our suite No. 14 on the first floor is unrivalled! Her Majesty the Queen of Würtemberg occupied it last year, and so did the Grand-Duchess of Luxembourg."

"Good! I am glad!" And Gérard gave a condescending nod to the elegant gentleman. "I shall be seeing the Vicomtesse before I leave in the morning."

Preceded by the night porter, he went upstairs to the second floor. He was shown into his room, the night porter went away, and Gérard, sitting on the edge of a chair, with his elbows on his knees, his head buried in his hands, savoured the delight of feeling that he was actually under the same roof with the woman who had become all the world to him.

* * * * *

He waited for a while—for a long while—until all sounds of activity died out in the house. Then he opened his bedroom door cautiously and peeped up and down the corridor. There was no one about. The shaded wax-candles had been extinguished. Up against the wall facing the staircase a night-light flickered feebly in the draught. The light was tempered by a panel of rose-tinted ground glass engraved with heads of angels after a well-known picture. All so very elegant and discreet. To right and left, down the corridor, the bedroom doors were all closed; outside some of them were pairs of shoes of varying shapes and sizes. Gérard went quietly down to the floor below. A thick carpet on corridor and stairs deadened every sound. The lights on this floor had also been extinguished and here too a night-light, shaded with rose-tinted ground glass, did no more than accentuate the gloom around. At one end of the corridor there were wide double doors on the panel

of which the number 14 was picked out in gilt lettering.

Gérard tried the door. It was locked. He knocked very softly at first, then a little louder. A woman's voice called out: "*Qui va là?*" and he knocked again; still quite discreetly so as not to alarm anyone. And presently one of the smaller doors close by was half opened, and a girl's tousled head was thrust out—obviously a maid just out of bed.

"What do you want?" she asked, and quickly added: "You must not make that noise, you will wake Madame."

And Gérard replied in an undertone:

"I must wake Madame. I have a message for her which I must deliver at once."

"From whom?"

"From M. Lucien Toulon, Chief Commissary of Police. It is most urgent."

"Wait!" the girl said. "I will see Madame."

"Tell her," Gérard rejoined, "that my orders are to give the message personally to her—to no one else."

The girl retired and closed and locked the door behind her. Gérard glued his ear to the keyhole but could hear nothing of what went on inside. Minutes of agonising suspense went by. After a long time he heard footsteps approaching the double doors and then the key was turned in the lock and the door was opened by the maid.

"You can come in," she said. "Madame will see you."

Gérard went in and found himself in a large sitting-room furnished in the usual banal hotel style. There was a lighted lamp on a table in the middle of the room, and on a marble-topped console immediately facing the door an immense bouquet of lilies.

The maid closed the door behind Gérard and then went into another room, presumably the bedroom, and he stood there waiting with his eyes glued on the door through which she would come presently. How long he stood there he never knew, the joy of expectation was so great that like all great joys it might have lasted one minute or an eternity.

And presently the door opened and she appeared under the lintel. She had on some sort of soft, billowy white gown, and Gérard's first sensation at sight of her was one of wonderment. It was she—Lorendana—and yet in some ways another woman, more marvellous, more exquisite, more adorable than the first. For one thing there was no black hair to jar with the mellow whiteness of her skin. That black hair had been a wig; her own was the shade of a ripe chestnut when first it bursts out of its green

shell. Evidently when she got out of bed she had just twisted it up into a bunch on the top of her head, one rebellious curl had escaped and lay against her cheek.

Nor were her lips now a vivid scarlet, they looked full and ripe, as luscious as a cherry. And there was that adorable mole above her upper lip. Her eyes looked straight at him, without any play of the eyelids, just straight out, neither in anger nor in wonder, almost as if she had known that he would come and had been expecting him. Before he had time to move, she had stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. They were alone together.

He went up to her and knelt down and his arms encircled her knees.

"My wife!" he murmured. "My wife!"

CHAPTER 22

The 7.40 Rapide to Feignies and Brussels was due to start in a few moments. Somewhere in the station a bell clanged. Heads and shoulders were thrust out of the carriage windows to shout final adieux to friends on the platform. Belated travellers came rushing out of the waiting-rooms or refreshment bars, jostling and pushing to get to their compartments. Porters slammed doors to or trundled rattling and creaking luggage-carriers away. Women like fussy hens in their unwieldy fashionable clothes shrieked confused instructions for the disposal of their luggage, argued about their seats, slapped their children, or clamoured for the guard.

On the platform there was a confused medley of coloured shawls and veils and hats; there were men in silk toppers and light overcoats, and men in blue tunics and linen trousers, men in military uniform, in the red and blue of the fire brigade, or the green of railway men; women waved handkerchiefs, men fluttered newspapers; whiskered dudes wearing monocles elbowed bearded farmers who reeked of manure.

It was a pushing, jostling, shouting crowd. Everyone pushed, everyone jostled, everyone shouted into the ears of any unfortunate man who happened to look as if he had something to do with the departure of the train.

"Brussels?"
"*Oui,* Monsieur."
"Tournai?"
"*Plus haut,* Madame."
"Cologne?"
"*Bruxelles seulement,* Madame."
"But I have my ticket for Cologne."
"You change in Brussels, Madame."
"But I don't want to change in Brussels."
The harassed guard put his tin trumpet to his mouth.
"*Allon!*" he shouted. "*En voiture!*"
And then came the: "*Adieu, Maman!*"
"*Au revoir, chérie!* Don't forget to write!"
"*Ici, Hélène . . .*"
"Oh, there you are!"
"Pierre, get in! You will miss your train."
"Attention!"
"*Mon Dieu,* I have lost my ticket!"
"Where did you put the hat-box?"
"Don't cry, *chérie!* We'll meet soon."
"Give my love to . . ."
"Don't forget the chocolates."

Gérard and the man in charge of him were in a first-class carriage. The man was talking with M. Prévost, who stood on the platform giving him final instructions.

"Only as far as Feignies."
"We go through the Customs, of course?"
"Of course. But after that . . ."
"I just leave him?"
"You leave him as soon as you are on Belgian territory."
"C'*est entendu.*"

Then the shrill sound of the tin trumpet, the hiss of the exhaust, and slowly the train steamed out of the station.

Gérard had taken his seat the farther end of the compartment. His travelling companion had lighted a cigar and then he waited until the train was out of the station, after which he said gruffly:

"A fine fright you gave me. I thought you had given me the slip for good."

Gérard shrugged.

"The room was so stuffy. I had to get some fresh air."

"Well," the man muttered, "I was on the point of going to the nearest commissariat—and that would have been the end of you, my friend."

Evidently he had had a fright which had upset his temper. As a matter of fact he should not have gone to sleep while in charge of a man who was still a prisoner. Fortunately his ill-humour took the form of taciturnity. He unfolded his paper and became absorbed in politcal news, and Gérard was left to indulge in day-dreams in peace.

* * * * *

The events of the past few hours were only a confused memory, out of which two moments stood out with dazzling clearness. First when she appeared to him in the doorway in her white billowy gown, with her chestnut-coloured hair piled up high in a bunch of curls on the top of her head. An immense tenderness for her had surged up in his heart at this first sight of her; a longing to worship and to protect at the same time. She looked so different then to the self-possessed favourite of a fastidious public—the dancer Lorendana. She looked much younger: a mere girl really, with immature figure and a look of innocence in her eyes. His instinct then had been to kneel down at her feet, to encircle her knees with his arms, to kiss her gown as he would that of the Madonna. It had been a beautiful moment, a phase in the whole history of love such as he had never experienced before in all his life. She was different to any other woman he had ever known and his love for her was different to anything any man had ever experienced. He had risked his life for the mere chance of seeing her and clasping her in his arms; but when he first started out from the fusty waiting-room he had not dreamed of anything like this —just the mere joy of kneeling beside her, of encircling her knees, and murmuring under his breath: "I love you! I love you! My God, how I love you!"

Even now when he sat alone—oh, so alone!—in the railway carriage watching the woods of Chantilly and Auteuil flitting past his gaze like a green translucent curtain, his eyes were filled with tears—they were tears of joy not of pain, joy in the memory of that most exquisite moment of passionate tenderness.

Then the second moment, when all of a sudden he realised that she was sending him away. She dragged herself away from him, and while he remained on his knees with words of love still lingering on his lips, all she did was to reiterate with passionate earnestness: "You must go away—you must . . . now . . . at once." He tried to recover the use of his tongue. He rose to his feet and tried to explain to her just how little M. Toulon and his police mattered to him, that life in future would only mean one long

memory far more painful than any thought of death. He was incoherent enough, probably, for all his senses were in a turmoil, but anyway she would not listen. At one moment she went to the door and opened it; then as he refused to move she shut it again and went to the window. Here she drew aside the curtains and peeped down into the street. She said: "The coast is clear—there is no one about. Go! You must go!" She would not listen to anything. She kept on reiterating: "Go! You must go!"

Then as maddened by her beauty, her nearness, the vitality and intensity of her, he seized her in his arms, held her tight—so tight that she could not move, and put his whole soul into the words: "I love you—my beloved—my wife!" she looked him straight in the eyes and said coldly: "I do not love you. Please go!"

It was a terrible moment, so awful that Gérard could still feel the pain like a stab in his heart—the physical pain of it quite apart from the mental. It was just as if she had stuck a knife into him; and what made it all so much worse that while she spoke in a harsh, dry voice quite unlike her usual mellow tone, her eyes were far from cold. There was a glow in them, a brilliance which he saw quite distinctly for the space of a second, until those tantalising lids fell like a curtain over the eyes. All he could do was to murmur: "You lie!" which, of course, was foolish. No woman has ever denied her love to the man himself—to the man if she loved him. But she made no reply to the taunt. All the blood which had rushed to Gérard's head and had run in his veins like fire seemed suddenly to have turned to ice. His grip round her shoulders relaxed and she was able to wriggle her lissom body out of his arms. She moved across the room and came to a standstill by the console table on which stood the vase of lilies. She stood there with her back to him, and in a kind of desultory way moved her fingers in and out among the flowers, touching first one and then the other. Those exquisite hands of hers!

Even then, with the blood cold as ice in his veins, Gérard felt transfixed with the beauty of her. The perfect, statuesque line she made, her body slightly tilted back, her head crowned with those chestnut curls on which the lamplight threw flicks of burnished gold. She seemed to be waiting for him to speak, and after a time he said quite calmly: "Why did you tell me that lie?" She shrugged lightly—what perfect shoulders she had!—and then said coolly:

"I was not lying. I don't love you—that is all."

"You are my wife," Gérard said equally coolly. "You know that?"

Again she shrugged.

"Your wife," she retorted calmly, "under duress."

"I know. But why?"

"It was necessary. You must have guessed the reason."

She busied herself ostentatiously with the flowers, arranging and rearranging them, and doing so she moved her head now one side, now the other, but she never turned to look at Gérard. He said nothing for the moment, and in the banal hotel room there fell a silence which made it seem like an abode of spirits: she at one end, toying with the flowers, and he in the middle of the room, feeling the ice in his veins slowly change back to hot searing blood —hot with jealousy, with rage and hatred. He strode across to her and seized her roughly by the arm, forced her to turn round and face him.

"I did guess," he said huskily, "but tell me."

The pain on her arm from that convulsive grip must have been very sharp, but she did not wince. All she said was:

"If you guessed why should I tell you?"

"I want to hear it from your lips."

"What?"

"That you wanted the use of my name so as to make it easier for you to carry on your abominable trade."

"I didn't want it!" she retorted. "It was forced upon me."

"By your paymaster?"

"Call it that if you like . . ."

"Then you admit it?" he demanded, and tightened his grip on her arm to such an extent that an involuntary little cry of pain came through her lips.

"You own to it?" he insisted.

"To what?"

"That you are nothing but a miserable spy in the pay of that worm Toulon?"

It must have been the pain in her arm that caused her cheeks and lips to turn the colour of dead ashes.

"Own to it!" he reiterated with that weird insistence which makes a wounded man sometimes gloat over the sight of his wounds.

"I serve my country," she said bravely, "as best I can."

"By taking blood money," he retorted, "by carrying on the dirtiest, filthiest trade that ever disgraced man or woman."

His rage got beyond control. Another moment and he would have struck her, so low had his manhood sunk through this overwhelming shame. His hand was already raised—God knows what

would have happened next had she not then murmured feebly:

"You knew that before you came."

Which was true. In a sense it was true. All along he had known that she was nothing but a spy. From the moment when she stood beside him by the Fosse de la Part-Dieu and dropped the sprig of rosemary down on Pierre's lifeless body, from that moment he knew what she was. He knew it when he followed her to the Rue Grenelle; he knew it when he, in his turn, fell into the clutches of Toulon and his gang. He knew it when she stood beside him at the altar and he passed the ring upon her finger. He knew it when, dreaming of her in the fusty waiting-room, the wild longing had seized him to see her once again before his past was blotted out and he commenced that new life in which she would have no part.

He had known it all along and yet he had come.

He had come because an irresistible force had drawn him—the force of unconquerable love. His arm fell, he hid his face in his hands, while he murmured dully: "My God! why do I not kill you?"

He heard the soft frou-frou of her skirts as she moved away from him. His hands dropped. He looked about him with a vague, dazed glance. She had crossed over to the door, her hand—that exquisite hand of her—was on the door handle. She looked so straight, so slim, so young—all in white—her gown no whiter than her cheeks, her lips half parted, the mystery of her eyes hidden by the heavy lids.

She opened the door and he went out of the room, and when he was in the corridor he heard the key turn in the lock. "I do not love you. Please go!" echoed in his ear. She had shut him out of her life because she did not love him; and he had been too great a coward to squeeze that life out of her. Well, let the new life commence for him now! He was ready, whatever it held out for him. A few moments' pain and he would finally tear out of his heart the image of Lorendana the spy, whom for one brief moment he had thought to love.

He walked quickly up the stairs, back to his room and picked up his hat. Then down again to the hall where the elegant, bewhiskered gentleman had retired in the meanwhile. Only the night porter was there, half asleep in a Louis XV *bergère*. Gérard roused him, gave him a substantial tip and demanded to be let out. The man had fortunately seen him tender the hundred-franc note to the clerk, so there was no difficulty in that direction.

The Place St. Roch was entirely dark and deserted. Gérard

walked rapidly in the direction where lay the Gare du Nord. He picked up a night cab presently and was put down at the station when the first pale light of dawn tinged the eastern sky with delicate lemon-gold.

* * * * *

Had Gérard de Lanoy been gifted with second sight the whole of his life would have taken on a different turn, for then through the double doors of No. 14 in the Hôtel d'Egypte he would have seen Lorendana, after he had gone, leaning for a moment against the door, her body rigid, her pale face like a mask of despair; then when his footsteps died away along the corridor her body suddenly crumpled up and without a moan she fell her whole length unconscious on the floor.

CHAPTER 23

But Gérard de Lanoy was not gifted with second sight. All he knew was that the woman he worshipped had shut him out of her life. "I do not love you! Please go!"

How he was going to live after that he did not know. Those rags of life which Lucien Toulon had thrown at him were worth less than nothing now. What would be the good of striving, of trying to create a new world for himself if she would not share it with him? He had never realised until after she had spoken that death sentence how he had nourished the hope that one day she would come back to him, that in some new as yet unexplored world he would live his life with her as his mate. In the Rue Grenelle—once—he had seen the love flame kindled in her eyes. And last night—at first—when she had stood in the doorway of her room, when obviously she had been expecting him, there was something in her attitude, in the whole expression of her that drew him to her feet, embracing her knees, and caused him to murmur in exquisite rapture the magic words: "My wife!"

He had been then nothing but a deluded fool. The hope to which he had clung so blindly had snapped like a thread under the grim scissors of Fate. "I do not love you. Please go!" and Gérard with a convulsive movement put his hands to his ears as

if to shut out the sound of her voice—cool, collected, inexorable—that kept on hammering into his brain to the accompaniment of the monotonous rumble of the carriage wheels.

* * * * *

Gérard and his escort—warder, jailer or whatever he was—were no longer alone in the railway compartment. They shared it now with a couple of loud-voiced vulgarians, who boarded the train quite early on the journey, and as soon as they were seated proclaimed the fact that they were going to Belgium on business. At first their conversation, always carried on in a loud voice, ran chiefly on gloves and neckties and the branch establishments which they desired to establish in Gand and Louvain. Gérard tried not to listen to their blatant talk, which irritated his aching nerves, but he could not help at times hearing snatches of their conversation. After this desultory talk on business—the price of lace and Customs tariffs—they switched over to ebullitions of rampant patriotism. They waxed more and more enthusiastic every moment on the subject of *la patrie* their beloved France, which from their lengthy outpourings was the one love of their life, and her glory and prosperity the single aim they had in view.

And half amused, half irritated, Gérard fell to studying the countenance of these somewhat aggressive patriots. At once he came to the conclusion that their beloved France had not as a matter of fact sheltered their birth. One of them was more swarthy than any Provençal or Basque Gérard had ever seen. He had large protruding eyes, dark and velvety, with opaque yellowish-white rims round the iris; they stood out like marbles each side of his fleshy hooked nose. His lips were thick and sensual, overshadowed by a glossy black moustache, and he wore a *toupé* of long wavy black hair obviously designed to cover the baldness of his cranium. Jewish, thought Gérard, or Slav perhaps, but certainly not pure French. He was very emphatic in his denunciation of the police of the Empire for its supineness in dealing with traitors.

"Our beloved country," he said at one time to his travelling companion, "is riddled with that pestilential brood. You remember that assassin du Pont-Croix, and his friend—I forget his name . . . ? Well, my friend, I have proof—absolute proof—that there is a whole clique of these young carrion, all potential murderers, ready to sell their country to the highest bidder, and belonging to the highest aristocracy in the land."

He raised his hand as if to call heaven to witness this horror of which he held the proof. It was a thick hand with spatulate

fingers, the first joint covered with a black down and ornamented with diamond rings.

Gérard loathed him.

"You have proof?" the other man murmured, visibly awe-struck by the enormity of what he had heard. He was small and spare, with lank, mouse-coloured hair, thin lips, and pale, watery eyes. He wore long Dundreary whiskers, his upper lip and chin were clean-shaved; his ears were large and stood out like flaps each side of his narrow forehead, and two large yellow teeth protruded between his lips. His whole appearance suggested an Angora rabbit, more especially when he sucked—as he nearly always did—the ivory knob of a malacca cane which he held clutched between his knees.

"Actual proof?" he insisted, and fixed his watery eyes on his companion.

Gérard hated them both. He turned his head away and stared out of the window. The two men put their heads together and whisperings and murmurings went on between them, interspersed with various ejaculations of emphasis on the one side and either wonderment or incredulity on the other. They had innumerable papers about their persons and fished these out of their pockets, glanced over them, and then put them back again. At times when the fat man had these papers in his hand, he raised his voice and talked about his business activities—a marvellous idea he had for securing the evening necktie to the collar without any fear of its riding up at the back. He was going expressly to Brussels to submit the model of his invention to a business man there who would manufacture it by the hundred thousand. He himself hoped to make a million out of it.

"If this infernal railway did not make such a hell of a row," he said at one time, "I would describe my idea to you more fully. It is so ingenious! I have got the specification here—just the drawings to guide the manufacturer . . ." And he turned over the leaves of a sheaf of papers which he had taken out of his pocket, and made as much noise with them as he could.

"Let me see the drawings," the rabbit-faced man rejoined. "I might help you with getting an order for you from Switzerland. I shall be going to Geneva next month. . . ."

The fat man demurred, but obviously only for form's sake.

"Just seeing the drawings won't help much," he said, but soon added: "Still . . . if you wish . . ."

And he handed the papers to his companion.

"You will see there . . ."

And the two men thereupon once more put their heads together and carried on a whispered conversation for a few moments, after which the thin man was absorbed in the specification of his friend's marvellous invention, whilst the inventor lighted a cigarette and gazed out of the window. But the perusal of the specification did not take long, and soon conversation on the subject of *la patrie* in danger was resumed as volubly as before.

"It is your duty to inform the police," the thin man declared emphatically.

"I did, my friend," the other asserted.

"You saw Lucien Toulon?"

"No. I did not. You know how inaccessible he is. He and that other one, Prévost, surround themselves with sycophants and minions as if they were as precious to the country as the Emperor, whom may God protect. I was referred to an underling, who took down my deposition and told me in an airy way that it would be placed before the proper authorities."

"And you mentioned names? And—and everything?"

"I did."

"And you have heard nothing more?"

"Nothing."

"It is scandalous!" the thin man exclaimed.

"That's what I say," the other declared.

And the whisperings and murmurings and patriotic outbursts about *la patrie* went on galore, while Gérard did his best to close his ears to all that blatant talk. His travelling companion did once catch his eyes when one of those patriotic outbursts was more aggressive than before; the man gave a significant shrug and his lips curled into a sarcastic smile. This was evidently not the first time that he had heard that kind of rubbish, and evidently he did not think it worth while to pay attention to it.

* * * * *

The train had been rattling along towards the Belgian frontier at a speed which would have seemed incredible a very few years before—at least twenty-five miles an hour. It drew up at a number of stations on the way and these halts always seemed interminable. Gérard, staring out of the window, would see the guard of the train and the local stationmaster holding long and animated conversations. At one station they were bargaining over the price of a dog which the stationmaster was trying to sell to the guard, and this went on for a quarter of an hour while the unfortunate

travellers were left to wonder if they would ever start once more on their wearying journey.

It was long past midday when at last Feignies was reached. The train came to a standstill at a small wayside halt on the French side of the frontier. All the passengers were ordered out of their carriages to comply with passport regulations. The two voluble patriots, brandishing their passports somewhat ostentatiously, hastened out of the compartment. Gérard, at a sign from his escort, remained seated. After a few moments a French official came along, opened the carriage door, glanced at Gérard and at his escort, nodded, and went away again. Outside the small station the passengers were queued up and sweltered in the sun waiting for their turn to have their passports examined. Gérard caught sight of his fellow-travellers in among the crowd: the fat man with the protruding eyes appeared most good-humoured, taking the inconvenience and the jostling and pushing of the throng quite cheerfully. He appeared to recognise one or two familiar faces among his fellow-travellers and waved his hand aloft, always brandishing his passport.

The halt did indeed seem interminable this time. Each passport was minutely examined and each miserable, perspiring traveller was asked numberless, wholly futile questions. When it came to be the turn of the fat man Gérard heard his thick throaty voice raised above every other sound in the station, giving his answers in an almost aggressively cheerful tone:

"Oui, Monsieur . . . Né à Folay près de Nancy . . . Père et mère Français de naissance . . . Oui, Monsieur . . . Officier au 51ième regiment d'infanterie . . . Oui, Monsieur. . . . Tout ce qu'il y a de plus Français. . . . Merci, Monsieur. . . ."

Gérard, stifled in the narrow airless carriage, hated him worse than ever. He pulled the blind nearest to him down with a jerk so as to be spared further sight of him and his rabbit-faced companion. Presently the two men scrambled back into the compartment. The fat man was mopping his streaming bald head, and the thin man, as soon as he had entered the carriage, fell back into his seat as if completely worn out with the heat or the long stand. His narrow face was all puckered up and his nose and mouth were quivering and working convulsively. Gérard could not help wondering why the man should appear in such a state of nervous collapse.

* * * * *

After endless delays the train started on again. Crawling at the

rate of five miles an hour, it slowed down even from that as Feignies came in sight. The small wayside station was on the side next to where Gérard was sitting. He drew up the blind again and looked out. The train was being drawn up in the middle of the permanent way; there were several lines of rails between it and the station platform. A good deal of animation reigned round about: people were standing in rows all along the railway lines and on the platform waiting for the train; half a dozen porters were in charge of luggage, and Belgian railway and customs officials were very busy doing nothing at all, lolling on the seats outside the station finishing their cigarettes, obviously determined not to hurry themselves.

Just before the train came to a dead halt Gérard's attention was attracted by a woman who was standing all alone on the permanent way. He could not help noticing her because of something strangely arresting in her personality. It was not because she was beautiful or smart or well-dressed; on the contrary. She was shabbily dressed in a black gown and pelerine of alpaca, green with age. She wore a black straw bonnet very much the worse for wear, with shabby lace lapels fastened in front with a jet brooch. Her face was thin and sallow and the tip of her nose was red. She had no gloves and her thin bare hands were clutching with a convulsive grip the handle of a small market basket. She wore steel-rimmed spectacles on her nose.

What first attracted Gérard's attention was the tense look of desperate anxiety not only on her face, but expressed in her whole attitude. She stood for a moment scanning the windows of the carriages as they moved slowly past her, then she began to run by the side of the train, and now and then she looked up at the compartment in which Gérard was sitting, and every time he caught sight of her face he was struck by that almost terrifying look of anxiety upon it. After a few more seconds the train finally came to a halt. Gérard prepared to make a move, for, of course, he would have to get out here and report to the French police in accordance with M. Toulon's instructions. All the passengers on the train had to get out for customs and more passport formalities. At a sign from his escort Gérard was on the point of rising from his seat when the two voluble patriots forestalled him. They pulled their portmanteaux and other impedimenta down from the rack and dragged them along the floor to the carriage door. Gérard was forced to remain seated as the doorway was now entirely blocked. With idle curiosity he watched the two men as they scrambled down the high footboards of the railway carriage. The

thin man got to the ground first; the other then handed the portmanteaux down to him, and Gérard had to endure the propinquity of that fat creature lurching against his knees. His bulk filled the whole of the doorway while he executed various manœuvres with his luggage. However, both the men were down at last. The fat man at once set to work to mop his cranium, while the other busied himself in collecting the luggage into an orderly pile.

And suddenly Gérard heard a loud cry: "Hugo!" And he saw the shabbily dressed woman trying to push her way through the crowd of fussy travellers and their piles of luggage. It was only after a few seconds that he perceived that the poor thing was trying to reach the two men. She looked like an agitated old hen now; her bonnet was awry and she was panting with excitement. But the men took no notice of her, though they must have heard her call. In fact she went on calling: "Hugo! Hugo!" in a more and more tremulous voice. At last she got near them. Gérard caught sight of her face under her shabby straw bonnet. It was almost beautiful so irradiated was it with joy. Obviously she could not speak for emotion, her jaw quivered as if she were about to cry, and her poor nose shone red like a beacon. But she was so happy, so happy after all her anxiety, and there was so much love and tenderness expressed in her thin pale face that she really looked almost beautiful. Still clutching her market basket with one hand she threw an arm round the fat man, or as far round him as she could reach, and fell panting and sobbing against his chest.

At first he took no more notice of her than if she was a lay figure; he just went on wiping his thick streaming neck, and said something to the thin man, who was still busy with the luggage. But after a second or two he said roughly:

"Don't be a fool, Anna!" and pushed her away from him so suddenly and so rudely that she was thrown off her balance. She lost her footing and came down backwards rather hard on the pile of luggage. Her bonnet fell off her head, her feet in elastic-side boots and white cotton stockings shot up in the air, and the lid of her market basket flew open and some of its contents—mostly paper parcels—were scattered round about.

"You drivelling fool!" the fat man muttered with an ugly oath, but neither of the men made the slightest attempt to help the poor thing up, or to ask her if she was hurt; neither did they collect her scattered belongings for her. It was quite pathetic to see her so humiliated, so repentant and so eager. She picked herself up as

quickly as she could and then scrambled about to find all the things that had fallen out of her basket. Gérard heard Hugo say roughly to her: "You haven't lost anything, I hope?" She replied meekly, "No, no, darling! Why, I've brought everything all this way, haven't I?"

She was up again now, with the lid of her basket down, its handle once more tightly clutched, and she was beaming, absolutely beaming on that fat beast whom Gérard loathed by now more than any human being he had ever known, not excepting Papa Toulon. And when in the end the brute turned on the poor thing and said rudely: "Put your hat straight and stop making a fuss!" he felt that if he were a free agent he would jump out of the carriage then and there and knock that egregious fellow down. After this, however, he lost sight of the strange trio, who walked away in the direction of the Customs office. The last thing he noticed was that the woman was left to follow the two men and to carry their heaviest portmanteaux.

CHAPTER 24

All the formalities imposed upon Gérard by the secret police were at last completed. Escorted by his travelling companion he went to the bureau of the French police representative and reported there in accordance with Lucien Toulon's instructions. He was given a French passport made out in the name of Paul Gérard, *étudiant en droit,* born in Paris, son of Antoine Amédé Gérard, *architecte,* also of Paris, and Marie Josephine his wife. Across the face of the passport was written:

> *This permit to circulate is not available in France or in any French colony or dependency.*

Gérard took the passport. To all intents and purposes he was a free man now, free to go anywhere he chose except in France. The writing across the face of the passport gave him a curious pang of nostalgia, of heartache different to anything he had ever felt before. One must be born a Frenchman to understand that feeling for *la patrie* as against what an Anglo-Saxon would call *home*. The Anglo-Saxon has gone to the outermost ends of the

world and made a home for himself and his descendants wherever fate or his own will have happened to drive him. That ability to make a home independently of other surroundings is usually, somewhat grandiloquently perhaps, termed the Anglo-Saxon genius for colonisation. But in a Frenchman that particular type of genius does not really exist. Though he, too, has done wonders in opening up distant lands and bringing to them his own civilisation and culture, those distant lands have only been for him a means to an end: he has only gone there through a sense of duty —not of mere adventure—and always with the one aim and object in mind, of the time when he can come back to France—to his wife and family, perhaps, but certainly to *la patrie*. Everywhere else is exile. And so it was with Gérard de Lanoy at the moment that the passport was handed over to him. As the words "Not available in France" stared him in the face they seemed like a dagger-thrust in his heart. *La patrie,* the land where he was born, was forbidden ground for him. Never again would he see it. The arid soil of Provence, the shores of the Mediterranean, the lonely Landes and crowded Paris boulevards would see him no more. Even now he was already on alien soil—Belgium. What was Belgium to France? Nothing. Not much of a friend even since the days of the first Napoleon's depredations. The language was the same, but the harsh Belgian "r's" grated unpleasantly on his ears.

With a sigh, which he tried in vain to smother, he turned away from the amiable official who had handed him his passport. His travelling companion now took leave of him, extending his hand which Gérard took in the spirit in which it was tended.

"You will be glad to be rid of me, Monsieur Gérard," the man said with a smile.

He remained behind in the bureau, talking to the official, while Gérard went out into the open. The station clock was striking two. It was swelteringly hot and the air was laden with coal dust and sulphurous smoke. Gérard inquired of a porter how soon the train would start for Brussels, and being told that it would be in about half an hour he wandered out of the station into the little frontier town with a view to purchasing a few toilet necessities for his immediate wants as he was entirely without luggage. He bought a small handbag and a few things he wanted, and then strolled back to the train.

He was a free man now.

* * * * *

Gérard had no difficulty in finding his compartment, the car-

riage door of which was still wide open. Standing there on the permanent way smoking a cigarette, his new handbag on the nearest footboard, he wondered whether he would be able to endure the company of those two egregious travellers any longer and listen to their vapid, obviously hypocritical ebullitions of patriotism, or whether it would be worth his while to go into another compartment where—as likely as not—he might fall out of the frying-pan into the fire. On the whole he thought that he would risk the change. No company could be worse than that of those awful vulgarians. He threw away his cigarette and was stooping to pick up his handbag when he noticed a long-shaped paper lying on the ground on the permanent way underneath the carriage. The paper was so like one of those which the two men had pored over during the journey that Gérard, for some unexplainable reason, was tempted to pick it up. He had some difficulty in getting to it, not wishing to dirty his clothes. An amiable porter, who was passing by, seeing what this elegantly dressed gentleman was after, dived under the carriage, picked up the paper, and handed it to Gérard with a cordial "Voici, Monsieur!"

He got a tip for this from Gérard, touched his cap, said: "Merci, Monsieur," and walked off.

And Gérard was left with the paper in his hand.

It was just idle curiosity that prompted him to open out the folds of the paper and to glance at the writing on it; idle curiosity to see what the much vaunted invention was like on which the egregious Hugo had set such store. To Gérard it was, of course, bound to appear futile, as his evening tie never did ride above his collar, and from the first it struck him as odd that such a large sheet of stout parchment-like paper should be required for such small drawings and so many lines of minute writing for the specification of such a simple article of apparel; glancing further at the writing and the drawings he soon realised that here was something far different to what he expected to find. The writing seemed to him a jumble of technical words, the drawings were large and elaborate, certainly nothing to do with collars and neckties. A deep frown of puzzlement began to gather between his brows. He was no technician and had no idea what the whole thing was about. He merely wondered why those two men should have talked so aggressively of collars and neckties when the papers which they handed to one another contained far more important and technical matter. He looked up from the paper and cast a glance all round him, as one does when one's brain is faced with something which appears quite unexplainable.

Just at that moment the first lot of passengers who had passed the customs came filing out through the barrier, and at once swarmed across the platform and the permanent way in search of their respective compartments. And suddenly Gérard became aware of a kind of human avalanche which descended upon him, without any warning, and to the accompaniment of shrill cries of: "Monsieur! Monsieur! It is mine! . . . You must not! . . . It is mine!" His wrist was grabbed and a heavy portmanteau was dropped on his foot. It had all occurred so suddenly and so quickly that he had no time to realise what the cause was of this violent assault. Only after a few seconds did he recognise in his assailant the shabbily-dressed woman who had aroused his sympathy a little while ago.

She looked more like a fussy hen than ever before. She had obviously been running with that heavy portmanteau in one hand and her market basket in the other, and had dropped both in her anxiety to retrieve the paper. Her bonnet had once more fallen off her head and remained dangling down her back, held by its shabby lapels; her poor nose was a bright red, her lank mouse-coloured hair hung in strands down her streaming forehead. But the expression of her face was one of such wild terror, the look in her eyes almost one of frenzy, so that instinctively Gérard, still puzzled, took a step or two backward. But again she cried out in her shrill quivering voice:

"That paper, Monsieur! . . . It is mine! . . . You have no right . . ." And grabbed frantically at his sleeve.

Then only did Gérard understand what the poor thing was after. With a polite: "Mais voilà, Madame!" he handed the paper back to her. She snatched it from him and immediately collapsed on the footboard of the carriage, her head buried in her hands, sobbing convulsively. Gérard was on the point of offering both sympathy and assistance when he heard the throaty voice of the fat man close to his ear, saying roughly:

"Don't be a d—— fool, Anna!"

The words acted like magic upon the poor woman's hysterical condition. She pulled herself together, passed her hand over her wet face and her finger across her nose; and Gérard, who could not take his eyes off her, saw that all of a sudden her whole face was transformed as if by a sorcerer's touch. She looked up at the man and there came into her eyes that look of ineffable tenderness which made her appear almost beautiful. Love—in its purest form, humble, generous and selfless, the love that is always content to give and never expects to receive, irradiated her face, gave

an exquisite curve to the thin, pallid lips, and a radiant glow to the eyes.

She smiled up at that ugly thick-lipped face above her as if it was the most lovely sight mortal eyes had ever beheld, and thus smiling she held the paper out to him. He snatched it out of her hand in his usual rough way and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Why, it's nothing important!" he muttered. "You always make such a silly fuss, Anna!"

He turned to Gérard, who had picked up his bag and made ready to go, gavè a knowing wink and with a significant gesture touched his own forehead. "Not quite all there," he murmured under his breath. "You understand?"

Gérard, swallowing his disgust, turned his back on the pathetic little scene and went in search of another compartment. He certainly could not have endured the company of that awful vulgarian again, and cursed himself for having picked up that stupid paper. Fortunately the other passengers had been far too busy with their own luggage and their own affairs to have paid more than passing attention to the incident, which in an unexplainable way had so profoundly affected him. He found a corner seat in a half-empty compartment, and having deposited his bag in the rack he leaned out of the carriage window, vaguely conscious of a desire to see what was happening to the poor woman with the red-tipped nose and the haunting expression of terror in her eyes.

The last he saw of her were her thin legs below her shabby skirt, in cotton stockings and elastic-side boots, as she scrambled unaided up the steep foot-boards of a neighbouring carriage, with her market basket on her arm.

Try as he might, during the rest of the journey to Brussels he could not rid himself of thoughts and conjectures relating to the strange scene in which he had played an unwilling rôle. The woman's face haunted him with its swiftly moving expressions of anxiety, terror, and that ineffable, unmistakable love for an abominable ruffian. She was too young to be his mother, but to Gérard it seemed that the love-light which transfigured her plain face into one of ethereal beauty was kindled by that maternal instinct which is inherent in women who are pure and good, and which no amount of unworthiness in the object worshipped can ever destroy. That brute on whom that poor woman shed the radiance of her love had not a single kind word or ordinary chivalrous attention for her, and yet she worshipped him. Her anxiety had been wholly for him, her terror only existed because he was in danger.

In danger of what?

Here Gérard's thoughts went off at a tangent; the woman's personality got mixed up with the whispered conversations of the two men; their blatant outbursts of patriotism, the lies they told, the sheaf of papers with the jargon of technical words and complicated drawings. In the midst of his own many-sided adventures Gérard wondered what it all meant.

Long afterwards when the key of the riddle was so violently thrust into his hands the pictures which always remained most deeply impressed upon his memory was that of this shabbily dressed woman scrambling up the foot-board of the railway carriage, where the bullying ruffian was already comfortably ensconced, her thin legs in white cotton stockings showing beneath her shabby black skirt, her thin hand clutching her market basket, her impossible bonnet dangling down her back.

CHAPTER 25

I WAS very fond of hearing the Duchesse talk about the official entry of the Vicomtesse de Lanoy into society.

"Out of deference to the Duke and myself," she said, "this occasion was deferred until after the first six months of our mourning for my dear Gérard. I was heart-broken and refused to go anywhere. My husband was granted three months' leave of absence from his duties at Court, and we went to our place at Rambouillet to spend those few months in peace. I may safely say that no man was ever so universally and so genuinely regretted as Gérard. He had been the most popular young man in society, beloved by all the mamas with marriageable daughters; the men liked him because he was so straight and loyal, a good sportsman and a fine athlete—which was an unusual thing in my young days, my dear, when our *jeunesse dorée* was inclined to be rather effete, and the women loved him because of his charming manners, because he was such a good dancer, such a witty talker, always courteous to the old and flattering to the young. As for that monstrous accusation of high treason against him, and that confession which that odious Toulon put about publicly, no one believed it for a moment. Gérard de Lanoy, a traitor? Gérard? Impossible!"

The dear old lady sighed; her still beautiful eyes took that expression of tenderness and of regret, which any reference to Gérard de Lanoy always worked in her. I loved to see it, for to me she always appeared so much more beautiful in that mood than in any other.

"There never was, there never will be," she said softly, "another man quite like *mon chevalier*."

I brought the conversation back to the Vicomtesse. She responded quite readily.

"Never shall I forget," she said, "my first introduction to her. It was six months after we received the awful news of Gérard's death and of his last-hour marriage. You may imagine that our feelings for his widow were not very tender. I never mentioned her name, for I may as well own to it now, that I hated her. Even the Duke, who was correctness personified, made no attempt to get in touch with his sister-in-law, in spite of the fact that the Emperor and the Empress did take such an interest in her. A friend of ours, the Marquis de Ravenne, made a remark to him one day on the subject. The Marquis, who belonged to the most intimate Court circle, was present on one occasion when the Emperor and Empress received the Vicomtesse de Lanoy privately. Their Majesties were, it seems, most gracious and de Ravenne heard the Empress say that she herself would bring about a meeting between the Duc de Lanoy and his brother's widow.

"The Empress didn't mention me on that occasion," the old lady continued dryly, "but as a matter of fact, the intimation that we were to meet the Vicomtesse at the Tuileries was sent to me. It came within twenty-four hours of our return to Paris, just six months after Gérard's death. The intimation was, of course, a command. The Duke and I could not refuse without incurring Their Majesties' displeasure. The invitation was for four o'clock in the afternoon. I was still in deep mourning, but we went with a certain amount of retinue: the men in black liveries and crêpe rosettes on the horses' bridles. Frankly, my heart did beat rather fast while I went up the grand staircase and when the great double doors of the reception salons were thrown open and we were ushered into the presence of Their Majesties. I can see them before me now. I have only to close my eyes and I can see them standing there. The Emperor with his long, waxed moustache, his tightly buttoned frock coat, and his black satin cravat with the diamond and pearl pin; and the Empress, looking at me intently with that slight, very slight squint which her admirers always maintained added to her charm. Her coiffure rose to an almost

giddy height: in front her fair hair fell over her forehead in a mass of small frizzled curls: her chignon was made up of large loops and frizzles which cascaded down the back of her neck and were held in by a torsade of her own hair mixed with mauve satin ribbon. In front she had a large bow of the satin with a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley and violets.

"Of course the colour mauve suited her fair skin to perfection. She had on a little rouge, but not much, also black crayon on her eyelids. I think that this was the first occasion on which she appeared without steel hoops to her crinoline. You know she had always a way of springing a new fashion on us without any warning, so as to make as many of us as possible look dowdy and *démodées*. I had nothing *outré* on, on this occasion, but I did wish I had known a week ago when first I went into half-mourning that she meant to abandon the steel hoops in favour of padding out the skirts at the back with horse-hair. Her dress was of grey taffeta silk shot with mauve; it was trimmed with puffs and *volants* of mauve satin. The upper skirt was looped up at the back and sides with huge bows of satin and her sash was of a deeper shade of violet. She looked beautiful as usual, I thought, although to me she seemed to have aged since I last saw her, six months ago. She looked worried, which was not to be wondered at, seeing how rapidly the Emperor's popularity and her own were waning, and how heavy were the storm-clouds that were gathering on the political horizon.

"The Emperor advanced to greet us and he kissed my hand as he always did. While he shook hands with the Duke I paid my respects to Her Majesty, who spoke a few words to me and then pointed to a group in the far window embrasure. My first impression of the Vicomtesse was of a tall woman, exquisitely dressed —in deep mourning, of course—moving across the long room towards me with exquisite grace. The Empress said graciously: 'It is our privilege, Duchess, to present to you the Vicomtesse de Lanoy.'

"Can you picture to yourself two young women bobbing a curtsy to one another with only their shoulders and heads appearing above their dresses, which swelled out like balloons around them. I looked down my nose while I curtsied and only glanced up afterwards. I must confess that I was almost dazzled with the beauty of this woman whom I had taught myself to hate. I don't think I had ever seen such lovely colouring: her skin was like the most beautiful, mellow ivory, and her hair of a glowing copper shade—neither red, nor dark, nor fair—but with lights in it that

I can only describe as ruddy gold. She wore a very small bonnet—black, of course—with lapels of exquisite black Mechlin lace which were fastened in front under a white camelia. The black did, I suppose, accentuate the colour of her hair. I noticed at once that she was not wearing the conventional crêpe veil of immense size which rightly belongs to a widow's mourning, but for this I did not blame her, for a more hideous fashion, or more ostentatious sign of sorrow, it would be impossible to conceive. Instead of it she wore a tiny tulle veil which did not quite reach the bridge of her nose. Very pretty and chic.

"The next few moments were, I felt, going to be very awkward. And they would have been, but for a happy little incident. The Prince Imperial suddenly came running across the room. It was with him that the Vicomtesse had been talking in the window embrasure. Evidently he and she were great friends, for it was to her that he ran, and he took hold of her hand, while he responded in his usual pretty little way to my formal curtsy. After that it was the Duke's turn to be presented to his sister-in-law. Here again it was the Empress who did the presentation. The Duke kissed the Vicomtesse's hand, and I can even now, after all these years, recall to my mind the picture of that stately room in the Tuileries, with the Emperor Napoleon, the Empress Eugénie still surrounded by all the pomp and magnificence of their exalted state: my husband stooping to kiss the most beautiful hand I had ever seen in my life: and the little Prince Imperial half hidden behind the Vicomtesse's voluminous skirts, his rather tragic dark eyes looking first at one of us, then at the other, just as if he guessed that there was something unusual behind this formal ceremony, the like of which he had so often witnessed before.

"The Empress made a sign for everyone to sit down. She and the Emperor engaged the Duke in conversation and I found myself seated beside the woman whom *mon chevalier* had loved so dearly that he bestowed on her the name of which hé was so proud. Frankly, I own, I hated her more than ever. I acknowledged her beauty, her charm, her perfect taste, her refinement, anything you like, but I could not help thinking that she it was who had caught the last glance of happiness in Gérard's eyes, the last look of love—and I hated her—my God! how I hated her!"

And as she said this, the old lady smiled. She smiled but I knew that the tears were not far away. She tried to convey to me the fact that all those youthful follies were now past and forgotten, but I knew better. Even through her smile I could see that the old wound to her loving heart still gave her a pang, softened by

the years perhaps, but hard to bear nevertheless.

"The Prince Imperial still clung to the Vicomtesse's hand," she went on after a time, "he was leaning his pretty head against her shoulder, and looking with his big, inquiring eyes at me. You may believe me or not, my dear, but I had the feeling then, that that boy's fate was destined to be a tragic one: it seemed as if, when he looked in that peculiar, inquiring way he had, that he was seeing visions—of the African bush perhaps, of dark, hostile, treacherous bodies, and death-dealing assagais. Well, I may be wrong! I may be confusing known facts with prescience of some which did not exist. Anyway, I know I did my best then to shake off the feeling of awkwardness, not to say hostility, which had possession of me. The Prince Imperial had given me the clue.

"I asked the Vicomtesse if she was fond of children. She replied, 'Passionately, Madame!' But after that we again came to a halt. Naturally enough. Here were we, I a childless woman, and she a widow without ever having been a wife; how could we talk of children in easy, conventional tones?

"However, we did talk presently of one thing and another. I don't know about her, but I for one had been taught since I was a child not to sit in society like a stuffed dummy, as if I had lost my tongue. My grandmother, the Marquise de Mortemart, who had been an intimate friend of Marie Antoinette, and one of the most admired at that brilliant court, put me through my paces long before I was grown up. 'Fanny,' she would say to me, '*faites la conversation,*' and I had to make conversation, whoever happened to be there; clever people, brilliant people, sometimes supercilious people—no matter!—I had to make conversation. At first these attempts ended in tears and my being sent out of the room as a stupid little dunce; I had to swallow my shame as best I could, kiss grandmama's hand, and curtsy to the company before I ran out of the room, my heart almost broken with mortification. But these incidents became more and more rare as time went on, and many a time have I thanked God for grandmama's stern discipline, for by the time I was 'out' I never was at a loss for conversation.

"While I talked of this, that and the other with the Vicomtesse I could not help staring at her sometimes, more intently than was consistent with good manners: and this was because I had the vague feeling that I had seen that beautiful face somewhere before. I could not remember where. Of course one saw so many faces during the Exhibition year that it was impossible to remember everybody, and I supposed that probably our new sister-in-law had

come in the suite of one or other of the exalted personages who came over to Paris during that year. I tried to draw her out, but she was very reticent when she talked about herself. She told me nothing, in fact. Absolutely nothing. And when we parted after fifteen minutes of this desultory conversation, I knew no more about her than I did before, except that she was beautiful, that she had perfect manners, exquisite hands and unerring taste in clothes.

"Neither she nor I mentioned Gérard's name throughout. When the Duke and I finally took our leave the Empress, when she took my hand, said significantly:

"I hope you and our dear Vicomtesse will be great friends."

"'Our dear Vicomtesse!' My dear, I can tell you I was boiling with rage, all the more as the Duke indulged in what he called pouring oil over troubled waters by saying a few rather vapid things: it only meant that he had fallen a victim to his sister-in-law's milk-white skin and copper-coloured hair. I hated her worse than ever."

CHAPTER 26

"PRINCESSE MATHILDE gave a brilliant reception in honour of the Vicomtesse de Lanoy," the Duchesse said to me on another occasion. "It was a year and a day after my dear chevalier's death, and even his widow would naturally lay aside her conventional mourning for the occasion. As for me I felt that no amount of crêpe and black clothes could ever give outward expression to what went on in my heart. His memory was as fresh for me as it was when last I said good-bye to him at Lyons. I must say that when I first saw Juanita in a coloured dress, it gave me a curious kind of shock. I had learnt by then that her name was Juanita—an exotic name which I didn't care about. Why couldn't she be called Jeanne like an ordinary Christian? However it had come to this by now, that I called her Juanita, and she called me Fanny.

"We didn't meet very often. Not that I avoided her purposely, but I seemed to have so little in common with her. The one topic of conversation which would have been all-absorbing to us both, we steadily avoided. It was the strangest thing in the world, but

as a matter of fact, during those six months following our first introduction to one another Gérard's name was never once mentioned between us. At the same time I am willing to admit that I found her a very interesting, even brilliant conversationalist: we discussed books together, plays, pictures: though she was very young—I guessed her to be just on the wrong side of twenty—she had read and seen a great deal, and what's more, she seemed to know a lot about the intimate lives of the men who were in the public eye just then. She had met the two Dumas, father and son, and knew how to appreciate the literary qualities of both. She lent me a curious novel, "Thérèse Raquin," which the young author Emile Zola had just brought out, and which was shocking some of our prudes. Then she had a good deal to tell me about that German composer Richard Wagner, who, she said, was busy writing a wonderful lyrical triology on the subject of the old German legends of the Niebelungen—magic gold which was supposed to be under the guardianship of the maidens of the Rhine, and the tragic story of a hero, Siegfried, who incurred the wrath of the gods by falling in love with his sister Sieglinde. It seems that this man Wagner had written an orchestral piece to represent the ride of a number of Germanic Amazons called Walkyries, which Juanita declared was the finest piece of orchestral music ever written.

"Then Desgas has just started to paint his realistic pictures. I had to confess that his fat-legged, ugly-faced ballerinas did rather shock me, until I went to his studio with Juanita and saw his marvellous studies, and was able to appreciate the vigour of his drawing. Juanita also told me that she had been in England, and had seen the English Queen, a wonderful little woman, the idol of her people; and the Princess of Wales who was the prettiest royal lady in Europe.

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"From all this you might gather that Juanita and I had got on terms of intimacy. But, my dear, is wasn't so really. I had shut my heart against her from the first and would not allow it to open out in friendship, even though I did find pleasure in her conversation. The Duke was, of course, fascinated. He never could resist a pretty woman for long, and it was out of deference to his wishes that I occasionally asked Juanita to dine and spend the evening with us. I always asked de Ravenne to make a fourth, and when we were tired of talking we wound up the evening with a rubber or two of whist. To see the four of us sitting round the card

table would have given you a perfect presentment of peaceful family life; yet there was I hating that woman all the time, because of what she must have meant to Gérard. I could see her beautiful profile in silhouette against the candle-light, and her perfect hands holding the cards, and in the dim light I seemed to see the shadow of my dear chevalier stooping to kiss her hair."

The dear old lady gave a slight shudder and drew her lace shawl more closely round her shoulders, as if she suddenly felt cold.

"I did hate her!" she murmured under her breath.

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"But I was going to tell you about Princesse Mathilde's reception," she resumed after a little while. "It was the first time I had seen Juanita in anything but black, and I must say that she looked positively radiant. You know the great staircase of Princesse Mathilde's palace on the Boulevard. Well! the Princess was standing under the architrave of the monumental doorway which gives on the ballroom. She was receiving her guests and I was standing close beside her at the moment that Juanita came up the stairs. Never had I seen anything more lovely. Her dress was of the palest pearl grey tarlatan. The upper skirt was edged with wreaths of pink roses and priceless blond lace, and hugely puffed out at the back under large clusters of rose-pink ribbon. Instead of a sash she had a wreath of the roses round her waist ending at the back with trails of roses and foliage.

"The same roses and foliage were twined in her chignon and fell mixed with a cascade of curls down her back. One cork-screw curl lay round her neck and rested on her shoulder, making it and her breasts look like alabaster.

"There you see," the dear old lady went on with a smile, "though I hated the woman, I was ready to pay tribute to her beauty: it was without the least feeling of jealousy that I heard the 'Oh!' of admiration which came from every man there, when the Vicomtesse de Lanoy thus made her first appearance *dans le grande société*. She was extraordinarily well received. This I must admit. In those days, you know, my dear, we were far more exclusive than even the best people are nowadays. We were rather apt, most of us, to look down our noses if anyone was introduced to us whose coat-of-arms did not carry eight quarterings at the very least. Money did not count with us then, only birth and ancestry: the rich grocer, or the Jew millionaire, strove in vain for a place in our narrow set; and there were some who

went so far as to criticise Princesse Mathilde because she tried to mingle the artists of Montmartre with the aristocracy of the Faubourg.

"But Juanita's beauty carried the day for her: the men at once became her slaves, and the women could not very well look down their noses when Their Majesties themselves made such a point of taking the Vicomtesse de Lanoy under their wing. I used to hear it whispered that she was, if not actually the daughter of the Emperor, at any rate a very close connection of his, and of course the romantic history of her marriage to Gérard gave the finishing touch to the glamour which surrounded her attractive personality. On this particular evening she had not been in the room five minutes before she was the centre of a court of admirers. I saw M. Thiers in close conversation with her, his small, shrewd eyes beaming on her from behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. She had a long talk with Général MacMahon, who was able to sharpen his Irish wit by contact with her glib tongue. M. Prosper Merrimée was one of the first to pay his court to the new social star, and Charles Gounod was asking for permission to dedicate his new opera to her.

"Presently the Emperor and Empress arrived, and the ball was opened with the regulation Quadrille d'Honneur. The Emperor graciously desired me to be his partner, and the Empress danced opposite to us with Count Nigra, the Italian ambassador. The *clou* of the evening was a Magyar gipsy band, the first that had ever been heard in Paris. They had come over from Budapest for the big racing week, and had at once become the rage. The Princess Mathilde had for her partner the young English Royal Duke, who was over on a visit, and opposite them was Juanita, with her partner Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern, whose pretensions to the Spanish throne would within a very short time set spark to the smouldering ashes of political ambitions and cause them to burst out into flames of fire, destined to consume for ever the pomp of Imperial France.

"Of course, there was no thought, save in the minds of a very few, either of political ambitions or of possible wars. None of us was gifted with prophetic visions: we talked or flirted with young Monsieur Félix Faure or Monsieur Casimir-Périer, little guessing that they would one day bear the title of President of the French Republic; we sat next to Général Bazaine at supper, not seeing in him a future traitor to his country. Monsieur de Lesseps talked to me about the wonderful canal he had been cutting through some part of Africa—near Suez, he told me. The inauguration

would take place at the end of November, and the Empress had of course promised to be present. M. de Lesseps, who was her cousin, owed, it seems, most of his success to her exertions. The world thought him a dreamer, a visionary. His scheme, the wiseacres said, was foredoomed to failure, but the Empress believed in him: for the past ten years she had helped and encouraged him; it was she who persuaded the French Government to take up a large block of shares in the company, and when the Khedive invited her to come over to Cairo for the grand inaugural ceremony she accepted with alacrity. The Khedive, in a wave of gallantry and enthusiasm, had built a palace on the shores of the Nile for her reception. M. de Lesseps told me all about it, but as he interlarded his conversation with a lot of technical details about his canal, I was rather bored. I much preferred to hear that amusing M. de Blowitz tell me in his throaty voice all the latest Paris scandals, or M. François Blanc extol his marvellous casino and gambling hall which he had built at enormous expense at a place in the south called Montecarlo. It seems that there had been a talk all over Germany that gaming houses should no longer be tolerated, and M. Blanc had looked about him for a suitable place to which he might transfer his activities. This Montecarlo had seemed to him an ideal spot. He had opened the Casino about six years before, and the *beau-monde* of Vienna and St. Petersburg was just beginning to find its way there. Paris, he was certain, would soon follow.

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"I did not dance a great deal that night, for I had not yet the heart to throw myself whole-heartedly into so much gaiety, but Juanita had apparently got over her first grief. I saw her cloudy grey tarlatan skirts floating about the room most of the time. She was a beautiful dancer, and of course her programme was full three and four deep for every dance, and she was the life and soul of the cotillon, which she danced with young Leopold of Belgium, and a splendidly handsome couple they made, though I for one don't like a young man to wear such a big beard.

"Juanita also danced a great deal that night with a certain young captain of artillery, Durobert by name. He belonged to one of our best families, *noblesse de province*, and he had been very well received in society because of his good looks and charming manners; he was a very good dancer, sat splendidly on a horse, and though he could not have been in any sense of the word

wealthy—his parents lived in a very small way on their insignificant country property—he spent money freely and was always ready to join in any entertainments that were got up by the *jeunesse dorée* of Paris, paying his share loyally and without any haggling.

"I am telling you all this, my dear, because of what followed the night of Princesse Mathilde's reception, when Juanita made herself rather conspicuous with young Durobert. People remarked on it, after she had given him the first lancers and then a quadrille and a couple of waltzes, and I must say that I did not think this was in the best taste on the part of a young widow so recently out of mourning. Someone, I forget who, told me afterwards that she had been seen after the ball driving in her carriage with the young man—the most charitable interpretation of this being that he was seeing her home; but one or two old cats would have it that the carriage was turned in the direction of Durobert's apartment—but to that piece of scandal I for one did not lend an ear. It was of course completely disproved by the tragedy which occurred the very next morning. Young Durobert shot himself. No one in the house heard the shot, but his valet, who was bringing him his breakfast, found him lying on the bedroom floor in a pool of blood. The bed had not been slept in, and he had been dead some hours. The valet sent one of the under-servants for the police, and the whole matter was hushed up. But you know how it is: things leaked out which some people believed and others laughed to scorn. It was said that Durobert was in the pay of the German Government, and that he had stolen a number of important papers relating to our armaments, and especially to the design of a new gun, on which our war ministry held great store, and the secret of which had been kept from all save a very privileged few. It was a shocking business, which horrified everyone, and started that spy-scare from which we in France have never quite recovered.

"As I say, the police did its best to hush the matter up, but Durobert's servants did not hold their tongues, and it was from them that the rumour originated about certain papers being found in the young man's desk. I suppose they overheard some remarks which the men of the police may have made while they searched the apartment. They were questioned, of course, as to Durobert's movements on the night preceding the tragedy, but they could throw no light on the mystery. Their young master had gone out to a grand ball, and left word that no one was to sit up for him, as he did not know at what time he would be home. None of the

servants had heard him come in, nor had they heard the pistol-shot.

"The tragedy cast a gloom over Paris society for a few days—I was going to say a few hours. After that it was forgotten."

CHAPTER

27

THE dear old lady was quite right when she said that the French people—especially the Parisians—did develop about this time the insidious malady of spy-scare from which they have not yet recovered—not even now. The suicide of the young artillery officer Durobert, obviously guilty of selling official secrets to the German Government, let loose a perfect avalanche of scandal about this, that or the other person who was supposed to be trafficking with foreign States to the detriment of France. Names of young men in the highest ranks of society were actually quoted in connection with these scandals, and everyone prophesied that there would be more than one sensational arrest or suicide within the next few months. And there were.

There was the case of Major Count de Tournevoy, of M. d'Alembert, of young Neuchatel and half a dozen others. All men of good family, some of them highly connected. The virus of treason, people averred, had crept into the army, the navy, the ministries. The trouble was that there was a great deal of truth in the stories that went about. Treason was rife in every grade of society. And for this there were two main reasons. Firstly, the ever-growing unpopularity of the dynasty. The terrible tragedy in Mexico, which was nothing but a humiliating disaster for France, had embittered the thinking and governing classes; for the workers and the poor the cost of living, rising by leaps and bounds, threatened misery in the coming winter. Harvests had been poor throughout the country, and disaffection was spreading like a canker all over the Empire. Everyone felt that war was in the air, that Eugénie, determined to save the dynasty and secure the throne for her son, was pushing the Emperor into a spectacular war which, with its glamour of victory, marching of troops and loud banging of drums, would bring back to the minds of emotional French men and women the martial pride their parents

had felt in the days of the great Napoleon, and reawaken their enthusiasm for the name of Bonaparte. But there were not a few who would far rather have seen the dynasty quietly swept away, without war or fuss of any kind, and there is no doubt that many plots were hatched—some of them entirely unavowable and unpatriotic—with that particular object in view.

The second reason why treachery became rife about this time was the question of money. During the last ten years immense fortunes had been made by one means or another—speculation in land and building sites, the new railways, industries and manufactures still in their infancy, but rapidly rising in importance and money-making. And those who acquired money fairly easily spent it with both hands. Extravagance in living and entertaining had gone beyond all bounds of moderation in the upper classes of society. And those who were less well endowed, and had the egregious desire to be in the forefront of the *beau-monde,* spent more money than they had, in order to be thought in the fashion and to be made as welcome in the *salons* of great ladies as were the plutocrats. And soon, of course, bankruptcy stared these poor fools in the face—bankruptcy which in those fastidious days meant social ostracism. And presently some of them found out that one fine way of acquiring money—quite a good deal of money—was by selling a commodity which was highly prized outside the territory of France—official secrets and documents. If one was lucky enough to have access to these things, one could always sell them at a good price. The transaction, once one knew the ropes, was easy; it was a ready-money business, expeditious and secret. True, if one got found out, it meant a cataclysm—the loss of everything at one fell swoop; but there was always a pistol handy, and if one plays for high stakes one must take risks.

Young Durobert had been found out. It was averred that he had received a hundred thousand francs in gold for the design of the new gun. And gradually other names were whispered in connection with that sort of trafficking. Some there were who even dared to speak of Gérard de Lanoy.

"Why should he have been put away with so much secrecy, my dear? Shot at dawn with hardly a trial, so I've been told; only allowed to marry a young wife at the eleventh hour, because she is a protégée of the Emperor. And you remember that other young man, Pierre du Pont-Croix, over in Lyons? My belief is that the whole of that clique of young coxcombs made a fortune by selling their country to Germany."

"What we want"—and this was said in the clubs—"what we

want is a better organised system of secret service. That *Cabinet Secret* is no good, and Lucien Toulon is just fat, and old, and archaic in his methods. Now I am told that in Germany and in Austria the government employs beautiful, fascinating women to put the police on the track of any conspiracy that may be hatched by young men in society, or in the army. A woman can ferret out a secret far more easily than the most astute police officer. But that old fool Toulon is too effete to think of following Germany's example."

That was said openly in the clubs; it was spoken of in restaurants and cafés, discussed in railway trains or at receptions and dinner-parties. It had become the topic of the hour. Whispers of war—the inevitability of war—were in the air, and the most elementary caution required the country to guard itself against treachery and against spies. There were very few thinking men in this year 1869 who did not perceive the war-clouds already gathering over the Rhine, and they were not slow in scattering the wholesome seeds of caution, and sounding the note of warning. But the seeds fell for the most part on barren ground and the note on deaf ears.

It was a gay season for those who had money: the weather was fine, the entertainments lavish, so why worry?

And the sycophants, and the optimists, and those who were in the entourage of the Empress, said openly:

"Why shouldn't we give those arrogant Prussians a lesson?" That is what those people said, and they said it so often and so convincedly that gradually they came to be believed. Why not indeed?

And learned professors compiled German dictionaries and grammars for the use of French soldiers when they would sit in occupation of Berlin. Young people talked loftily of the unconquerable French army. They recalled Austerlitz and Jena, Solferino and Jaffa—but they omitted to mention Waterloo.

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Echoes of all this reached Gérard's ears in Geneva, where he spent the whole of his first two years of exile. He had chosen Geneva because on clear days he could see from the windows of his apartment the snow-capped mountains of France; and when the wind was in the right quarter, blowing over the peaks of the Jura straight in his face, he could indulge in the fancy that he was breathing the air of France. On those halcyon days he would stand in the window of his room, or stroll out on the lake-side and

fill his lungs with the air which Juanita was breathing.

Juanita Lorendana! the name was music to the ear. Lorendana the divine! Juanita, his wife! the woman he loved more passionately as week upon week and month upon month went by, and time seemed to find a grim pleasure in heightening the barrier that separated her from him. Juanita, his wife! Lorendana, the spy! the tool of Lucien Toulon, who had filched his name, the better to carry on her abominable trade. To what depths of degradation then had he, Gérard, Vicomte de Lanoy, sunk that he could not tear her image out of his heart? that with the days, the weeks, the months, his love obliterated all thoughts of what she did, because of what she was: Lorendana the divine!

There was hardly a moment in that banal life which he led in Geneva during those two years, that she did not stand pre-eminent in his thoughts. But her image was a mental torture because, side by side with it, cruel demons would show him Pierre's sad face and reproachful eyes, and that abominable Lucien Toulon who paid her—paid her!—for what she did. He tried with all the strength of will at his command to banish her image from his thoughts, but up to now he had failed. He earnestly and seriously tried to map out a future for himself, a future in which hard work—manual work for choice, the kind that tired the body out and was conducive to sleep—would help him to forget. He held consultations with various eminent Swiss Professors with whom by chance he came in contact, over the possibilities of embarking on a professional or artistic career. He had ability, youth, a burning desire to study; he loved the idea of trying to make himself fit for the medical profession, of devoting himself to science—something that would benefit mankind and take him out of himself.

He nourished ideals of self-sacrifice; he dreamed of fever hospitals and leper colonies, or missions in Central Africa. The eminent Swiss professors took a great interest in the young Frenchman with the sad face and disillusioned outlook; they gave advice and offered help, and Gérard would be roused to make great efforts in study and concentration. But the time had not yet come for him—the time when he could find peace of mind, for over there across the lake were the snow-capped mountains of France; and on certain days, when the wind was in the right quarter, there came to him, wafted on the ice-cold breeze, visions of Lorendana in her white lace dress standing in the doorway of the hotel room with a look of expectancy in her eyes. Then he would throw books aside and stand at the window breathing in the air which she breathed, and it seemed to him as if that air was filled with the

perfume of her hair and the soft rustle of her gown.

The time would come, of course, when he would be freed from that obsession, but it was not yet. Every fibre of his being was bound to Lorendana and to France; it would be a long, long time before they were worn thin, and, as far as he could foretell, they never could actually snap.

There were times when he longed to end it all, when he thought of crossing the frontier which was so near and going back to France, and letting Lucien Toulon and his horde have their way with him. He would then be shot as a traitor, shot in the back, according to the penal code of France—well, why not? To all intents and purposes, to his friends and acquaintances he had undergone that fate already. His confession had, he supposed, been made public. His brother, Fanny, Cécile, de Neuvic and the others, they all believed that he had died a traitor—shot in the back, his body thrown into a ditch! So why not?

He did think of it, but he didn't do it. Somehow to his fastidious taste such a surrender stank of cowardice. In the first flush of excitement, after hearing Lucien Toulon's ultimatum, he had decided to fight—to fight for a new life in a new world, as others had done before him. To give up the fight after a few months' weariness or nostalgia would be the act of a weakling and a moral coward, and whatever happened Gérard did not want to be that. He felt that if he did surrender to fate now, he would be deserving of a shameful death—a volley of shot in the back, a fall down on his face and his body thrown in the ditch.

But even so, I imagine that he would have risked everything, if Lorendana had not spoken the words which had shut the gates of life against him more effectually than any decree of Papa Toulon:

"I do not love you. Please go!"

CHAPTER 28

GÉRARD had taken an apartment in a house next-door to the big Hôtel Belle-Vue which faced the lake. Every evening at half-past six he ran down to the quay and bought one or more of the Paris newspapers which had come in by train and were on sale at the kiosk at that hour.

The Paris papers! The *Figaro*! Gérard knew that genial old Blowitz who owned it; many a time had he dined with him, supped with him, discussed with him some of the social items which were a feature of the paper. *La Patrie*. *Le Journal*. *La Presse*. There was something delicious in the very feel of the papers; they were still damp from the printer's ink. Bad ink it was, which didn't dry properly, but Gérard loved it because it gave him the sensation' that the paper was just fresh out of the printing press and that he had the latest news. News from Paris! The boulevards, the theatres, the routs and parties; Charles Gounod's new opera, the new revue at the Châtelet, Emile Augier's latest play, Desgas's famous picture bought for the Luxembourg! And the fashions! Even the fashions, since news of them came from Paris! the crinolines had definitely yielded to immense bustles padded out with horse hair; stripes were all the rage; Metternich green was the favourite colour; trimmings on the shoulders were all placed with the headings upwards and not falling back upon the sleeves. Coiffures were less exaggerated; the volume of chignons had decreased. And Gérard read about casaques and about palatines edged with swansdown, and about the long ribbons of glaring colour worn in the middle of the back like reins and facetiously called "*suis-moi, jeune homme*", he smiled when he read about the large cluster of satin bows applied to the waistband, and called "*a moi gendarme*"!

And whilst reading all this, what he did was to imagine Lorendana in these new-fashioned gewgaws, her graceful figure distorted by that grotesque padding-out at the back—a ridiculous contrivance which the comic papers termed "*sous-lieutenant*," and delighted in exaggerating its size. He thought the smaller chignon would be becoming to her prettily shaped head; her lovely hair had no need, he thought, of artificial additions. He liked the idea of the new fichus round her beautiful shoulders, and was sure that the new colour—Metternich green—would suit her fair skin admirably. Then he would smile grimly when he read the denunciations of present-day extravagance, both in the more sober newspapers and in the pulpit, where Père Félix, the fashionable preacher at Notre Dame, fulminated against the immense tournures. There was a report one day in the *Gaulois* of one of his sermons, in which during the course of an impassioned discourse he said: "Now for a word or two on the present ridiculous fashions. The ladies of a hundred years ago, with their panniers which stuck out on their hips, only resembled washerwomen, but the present costume, supported by heavy armaments of horsehair,

is positively grotesque. Two ladies can no longer sit on a sofa side by side. Dresses are so lavishly ornamented with bows and puffs and ruches that a woman cannot sit down comfortably, or rest her back, for fear of rumpling her trimmings."

Egged on by these denunciations, an author whose anonymity was said to conceal an aristocratic name, published a book which he called: "Luxury, our Enemy!" Gérard was able to buy a copy in Geneva, and found it most amusing; it was distinctly spiteful and ill-natured; the author had probably suffered from the extravagance of his wife, and he had a very attenuated sense of humour. He railed against the new habit which ladies had developed of perpetually looking at themselves in small pocket mirrors set with jewels and passing a black pencil under their eyes. Powder and paint had, according to this author, become general. "Here and there," he said, "the glare of the rouge is tempered either by white to set off the skin, by black to stimulate the lashes, and by blue to tint the eyelids." And Gérard, smiling complacently to himself, reflected that Lorendana would never need these artificial aids to her own smooth, ivory skin. He would read the papers from end to end, because it was among those items that he hoped to come across the name of the Vicomtesse de Lanoy. During the first few months he encountered nothing but disappointments; there was hardly any mention of the Vicomtesse in connection with social events. Once or twice her name appeared in print as having been asked to luncheon at the Tuileries, or having been seen in the company of the Empress at a picture gallery or charity bazaar. She was still in deep mourning, so that paper said with tactful discretion, after the tragic death of her young husband. But nevertheless her toilet when she accompanied the Empress at the opening of the Salon was fully described in the *Figaro*. Black taffeta with deep flounce of *crêpe anglais*, and an exquisite shawl of black Brussels point. Bell-shaped sleeves edged with *crêpe anglais*, black kid gloves and button boots. Gérard, when reading such scraps would close his eyes and try to visualise Lorendana in stiff black taffeta and *crêpe anglais*, and to imagine her exquisite hands in black kid gloves.

It was not until a whole year had gone by that he read of the widowed young Vicomtesse de Lanoy being present at the grand ball given by Princesse Mathilde in her honour. The élite of Parisian society was there, and Gérard read about the wonderful impression which the Vicomtesse's beauty, her grace, her charm had made on all those present. He read about her dress of cloudy grey tarlatan and the wreath of pink roses round her waist; he read

about the roses in her hair and the curl which came to rest on her white shoulder.

And with a sudden revulsion of feeling he thought of what all that crowd of worshippers at her shrine would think, how they would act if they knew what he, her husband, knew of her: that she was a spy in the pay of that infamous Toulon: how all these elegant young men and high-born ladies would turn away from her in horror and contempt. To Gérard this thought was like a physical pang, like a dagger-thrust in his heart.

Fanny de Lanoy, so fastidious and exclusive, his brother the Duke, his friends de Neuvic, Méricourt and the others! If they knew that she had had a hand in the terrible fate of Pierre du Pont-Croix! Heaven above! her very life would not be worth an hour's purchase.

But they knew nothing, they couldn't guess. He, Gérard, had guessed, because quite against her will of course, she had revealed her soul to him, when she dropped the twig of rosemary on Pierre's lifeless body. But those others, they only saw her beauty, felt her charm, fell captives to that enchantment which she wielded over all those with whom she came in contact. And with a sigh of longing Gérard fell to praying that none of them ever would guess. By closing his eyes he tried to picture Juanita as she must have appeared to hundreds of admiring eyes the night of the ball, coming up the grand staircase of Princesse Mathilde's sumptuous apartment.

The Emperor and Empress had been present on that occasion and dear, dear Fanny; M. Thiers, M. de Lesseps and all the stars of upper-Bohemia, whom the Princess loved to welcome in her *salons*. Ah, yes! Paris was gay! very gay despite the storm-clouds that gathered heavy and ominous and came rolling in from over the Rhine. The Emperor was ill, the Empress was worried to death, embittered because some of her supreme power in the affairs of state had been wrested from her by the Liberal Ministry; she longed for the hour when she could seize that supreme power again, when she would drive into Berlin in her landau drawn by eight horses and surrounded by her victorious troops, when she would see her enemies humiliated and the King of Prussia at her feet.

But she would not let the outside world see what she suffered and what she dreaded; she laughed and she danced, she flirted with Metternich; she flattered the Tsar and received the homage of the Khedive.

Paris laughed and danced while over on the other side of the Rhine Bismarck was busy preparing his formidable army.

CHAPTER

29

THUS the spring of 1870 came along.

March! with its cold winds and snow-showers alternating with days of brilliant sunshine and promise of spring.

Gérard of late had taken to buying his daily paper from an old man who was in charge of the kiosk at the corner of the Jardin Anglais—a funny old fellow who despite his almost grotesque appearance looked like a learned professor at a university. A Frenchman obviously, perhaps from the south, and a highly educated one at that. Gérard wondered what had brought him down to selling newspapers in a foreign city. Some tragedy of course—disgrace perhaps, for now and then, especially when some of the passers-by who stopped at the kiosk asked for papers from France, he would keep his head down, and fumble under the counter till he found what was wanted, then take the money quickly and quickly give change, always avoiding the direct gaze of his customer. He had a high domed forehead,over which he wore an amazing soft black hat, with a wide brim and very high pointed crown. The hat was green with age, and he wore it at the back of his head; from under the frayed brim, strands of mouse-coloured hair would escape when there was a wind, and flutter over his forehead and his eyes. He wore large, horn-rimmed spectacles, through which his eyes, of a pale watery blue, appeared unnaturally large; his thin Roman nose was always red and on the extreme tip of it there invariably hung a drop of moisture. Lank mouse-coloured hair adorned his pallid, sunken cheeks. He looked for all the world like a caricature out of the *Vie Parisienne,* with his shabby overcoat once black, but, like his eccentric hat, green with wear across the shoulders; his shoes down at heel were much too large for his feet, and on his hands he wore an old pair of kid gloves with the fingers cut down half-way.

Gérard had taken a great liking to the old fellow. Somehow he felt that here was a companion in misfortune. Friendship between them began with the passing of the time of day, a remark or two about the weather, and then early in the winter on a bitterly cold morning Gérard put together a warm coat and a pair of stout

boots which he had bought for the old boy and gave them to him. The look of gratitude in those pale watery eyes brought a lump in his throat and he walked away from the kiosk as fast as he could.

But after that the old vendor of newspapers became quite communicative, though only by fits and starts. He did not tell Gérard his name, and Gérard never got to know it, but now and then he would let fall hints of his previous history. He had married very young and been madly in love; but his wife cared little enough about him; she had married him because she—the daughter of a small shopkeeper at Grenoble—had been dazzled by the prospect of being the wife of a Professor at the University, of being invited to the receptions given by the Préfet at the Town Hall, to have a maid of all work to do the cooking and washing for her, in a word to become an important lady in Grenoble. She was pretty it seems, and had engaging manners which caused her to become popular in University circles. She was invited to numberless parties, the local papers mentioned her name in their society columns: M. le Procureur spoke of her as the prettiest woman in the department.

"She was young, you see, Monsieur," the old newsvendor said and turned pathetic eyes on Gérard as if asking indulgence for the frivolous young wife of long ago: "and I suppose all that flattery and adulation turned her pretty head. She did not realise that the stipend of a minor Professor at the University was not exactly princely. She just wanted to have nice clothes and furs and jewellery, the same as her friends, and I loved to see her decked out for a grand reception at the Town Hall, with her beautiful shoulders bare and an expensive necklace round her exquisite throat. It was all my fault I know," the poor man went on and with the back of his hand he wiped the obstinate drop of moisture off the tip of his nose, "I ought to have been frank with her, I ought to have explained my position—I was not rich enough to indulge her as I did. She was very intelligent—she would have understood. But, *que voulez-vous*? I loved to see her smile when she put on a new dress, and when I bought her a bit of jewellery which she had coveted, she used to shower kisses on me for which I would have bartered my soul. So you see, Monsieur . . ."

Gérard did see. He guessed the rest of the pitiable story. The stupid, banal, age-old story, as old as the hills. The extravagant wife. The poor fool of a husband madly in love. The want of money. The temptation. The inevitable fall.

"My uncle was rich," the old man said on another occasion.

"He intended to leave me all he had. I went to him when I was short of money—dressmakers' bills, jewellers, milliners—a more expensive apartment than we could afford. I only asked for a loan, but he had heard rumours. He read me a lecture on my wife's extravagance, paid my debts that once, but swore that he would never do it again. He said some very hard things about my beloved that time, and so, when I was once more in trouble, I knew that it would be no good to go to him again—and then——"

"What was it?" Gérard asked pityingly, "Forgery?"

The old man nodded.

"My uncle was very ill at the time. The doctors said he had not more than a few days to live. I was his sole heir and I thought he would never find out—and so——"

And so . . .

The story as old as the hills. A forged acceptance at the foot of a bill. Then discovery. Prosecution. Condemnation.

"Your uncle recovered?" Gérard asked.

"Yes, and lived long enough to see me condemned to fourteen years' penal servitude and to cut me out of his will."

The old man's thin pallid lips quivered as if he was about to cry, but not a single tear came down his furrowed cheeks. Perhaps he had shed so many, he hadn't any left.

He had done three years in a penal settlement, and his wife had never once attempted to communicate with him; then one day news reached him that she was in a municipal hospital, dying of tuberculosis. How news of that sort ever does penetrate through prison walls, it is impossible to say; but it does happen occasionally, and did, in this instance. It also happens though more rarely that a determined prisoner, or one who through good conduct has earned certain privileges, succeeds in effecting an escape. Gérard's friend was both privileged and determined. As soon as he received the news he planned to get away: he was resolved to reach France at whatever cost so as to see once more the wife whom he still idolised.

"I felt that if I held her in my arms," he once said to Gérard, "death would not dare approach her."

He had a good many privileges, and a certain measure of freedom within bounds, as his conduct during the three years had been exemplary. He did manage to escape, and to make his way to an adjacent British colonial settlement. Thence he made his way to France, and finally arrived at Grenoble having so far evaded the police. Somehow or other he managed to glean information about his wife. She had died in hospital, but it seems that the rich

uncle either tardily repentant of his callousness or perhaps merely unwilling to see one who bore his name buried in a pauper's grave, had arranged that the poor woman should be decently buried and that a stone with her name graven on it should mark her last resting place.

It was by the side of his wife's grave in the Cimetière Ste. Anne that the young widower was recaptured by the police. He was deported to New Caledonia, where owing to his evasion he was subjected to more rigorous treatment than before. According to his own words he went through hell that time. But once again he managed to escape. His adventures on this occasion would, Gérard thought, have filled volumes. He was wise enough to avoid France and contrived somehow or other to reach Switzerland, where he had remained ever since.

He was forty years of age when he arrived in Geneva; that was twenty years ago, at a time when France was in the turmoil of her third revolution, and all her police had more important matters to attend to than the capture of an unfortunate derelict.

CHAPTER

30

The whole of the banal, infinitely sad story only came out bit by bit, like a serial in a magazine, and many months intervened before Gérard heard the last instalment. He took a great liking to the old chap: out of intense pity had sprung what almost amounted to friendship. They were companions in misfortune these two—both of them exiled from their country which they loved. Gérard did not speak about himself but he found great solace in making the old man talk.

"You don't suffer from nostalgia, do you?" he asked him at once.

The other shook his head. "I did at first," he said, "but not now. One gets old you see, and feelings gets blunted. But sometimes . . ."

"Yes? Sometimes?" Gérard asked, for in the newsvendor's pale eyes there had come a strange look which was difficult to interpret.

"I read the papers," the old fellow said with a slight shrug: "we all read our papers, what? All of us Frenchmen that is. Well?

What do you make of things over there?" and he nodded in the direction where the snow of the Juras glimmered in the sun.

"You mean politically?"

"Yes."

"The Empress wants war," Gérard said with a sigh; "she wants to make sure that her son will be Emperor some day, and she looks forward to a spectacular victory."

"But the Emperor knows better. He is a shrewd man is our third Napoleon. Much more shrewd than his enemies give him credit for; and sickness has killed ambition in him."

"I am afraid so."

"He is a wise man who knows the faults of his own child," the old newsvendor said sententiously, "and only a foolish ruler underrates the weakness of his people."

"But the army," Gérard protested hotly, for he had been born and bred in the glorious tradition of an ever-victorious French army.

"It is a wise ruler," the old man murmured with vague irrelevance, "who recognises the weakness of his army."

"What makes you say that?" Gérard retorted. He felt unaccountably irritated by the man's talk, which to his fastidious ears savoured of high treason.

But before the old newsvendor had time to reply, other customers came along, who wanted this, that and the other, and Gérard with a shrug collected his papers and walked away.

* * * * *

This was towards the end of March, 1870. The winter had been very severe. Now the spring mornings were usually mild and sunny, but the snow still lingered on the heights and it would turn very cold after sundown. Gérard, after his conversation with the old newsvendor, did not feel inclined to turn out again. He had two or three interesting books and the daily papers to read, a thesis to complete, which Professor Landry of Zurich had promised to criticise, and he made up his mind to spend a cosy afternoon by the fire, reading and studying. But despite himself his thoughts reverted now and again to the old scarecrow at the kiosk. It was perhaps the first time in all his life that Gérard Vicomte de Lanoy had heard a Frenchman utter disparaging words about the French army, and it vexed him—vexed him quite seriously—that those other customers should have come along just then and prevented him administering a rebuke to the offender. He quite made up his mind that he would do this at an early

opportunity. The next day, however, and for several days after that this opportunity did not present itself. There were always a number of customers round the kiosk, whenever Gérard passed by or stopped to buy his papers, and it was much too cold to stand about and wait until the newsvendor was no longer busy.

But one day, about a week later, he found the kiosk momentarily deserted, and the old man sitting under shelter reading *Le Petit Journal*. Gérard's irritation against him had naturally cooled down by now, and he was only conscious of a vague curiosity, a desire to make this funny wreckage of humanity, who could not possibly know anything of what went on in the outside world, air his views on the political situation.

So after he had passed the time of day and made a few desultory remarks about one thing and another, he took up *Le Gaulois*, glanced at the news, and at once pointed to a glowing account of a magnificent review which had been held at Longchamps, by the Emperor in the presence of the Empress, the Prince Imperial and the Chinese Mandarins who were on a political mission in Paris at the moment.

"That doesn't look like weakness, my friend, does it?" he said lightly.

The old man glanced at the paper and retorted with a shrug: "Appearances are deceptive."

"You think so?" Gérard remarked ironically.

"I don't think," the newsvendor rejoined, "I know."

"You can't know, my good man. How can you? here in Geneva, and . . ."

But this time the old man proved obdurate. Under the pretence of sorting out his newspapers, he remained obstinately dumb. Customers came and went, and once or twice Gérard tried to draw him out, but without success, all he got out of him was now and then a shrug and a mutter: "I know . . . I know . . ."

And Gérard walked away, vaguely disturbed in his mind. Strange that he should take that one man's utterances so seriously; after all what was the old scarecrow but an insignificant personage, an outlaw escaped from justice, an ex-convict, a senile castaway? Nevertheless there had been something in his manner that had excited Gérard's curiosity. What did that old newsvendor know? Did he know anything? After all, thought Gérard, he sees a great number of people daily; he hears their talk, for they would not think of curbing their tongues before this poor caitiff; he read countless newspapers in several languages. Gérard had

noticed that he often picked up a German paper, and he had heard him talk in Italian with a peasant from the Ticino. He might know something, but what?

* * * * *

Then one day—it was towards the end of April—when he arrived at the kiosk, the old man was just giving change to a customer who had purchased a couple of German papers, one of which was the *Neue Freie Presse* from Vienna. Something in this man's broad back and his expensively tailored coat arrested Gérard's attention for a few seconds, and when he turned to the newsvendor, he saw that the latter's pinched face had taken on an expression which completely transformed it—contempt was expressed in the curve of the thin, bloodless lips, and behind the huge spectacles the pale eyes seemed to gleam, like those of a feline who would like to spring but dare not.

As soon as he caught sight of Gérard, however, his face relaxed a little, though he still cast a lingering look of enmity on the rapidly retreating figure of his customer. Then he murmured through set teeth:

"If only I were twenty years younger . . ."

"What would you do, my friend?" Gérard asked with a certain carelessness, which he was far from feeling. It was always difficult to get the old man to talk, especially if he thought he was being deliberately drawn out. Gérard's curiosity had been more than usually provoked by the strange expression in the newsvendor's face, but he was afraid of putting him off by direct questioning, even though he felt determined to make the funny creature unburden his mind. So he kept up an air of detachment, picked up one paper after another, made a few casual remarks and finally said:

"I think we all wish sometimes we were a few years younger."

"Not you, Monsieur," the old man murmured with a quick sigh, "you are young . . . but I . . ." he broke off abruptly, then reiterated: "If only I were twenty years younger."

"Well?" Gérard asked with an encouraging smile, "what would you do, my friend?"

Immediately the old man's face took on once more that expression of hatred and contempt.

"I would," he replied, "stalk that traitor till I delivered him over to the hangman."

"Traitor?" Gérard queried: "Why traitor?"

"Traitor is a mild word," the newsvendor replied, and his pale

eyes, this time, had in them the look of a potential murderer: "I should have said foul fiend, scum of the earth . . ."

"But why?"

"He is a Frenchman, save the mark! and he is selling his country to the highest bidder."

Never before had the old man spoken so firmly and apparently with such set purpose; obviously, he could not contain himself; there was something on his mind, some secret which the presence of the man in the expensive coat was almost forcing him to reveal. Gérard, deeply interested, could only hope that nothing would happen to stop this unexpected burst of confidence. He didn't want to say anything that would cause this strange creature to withdraw like a frightened snail back into his shell, out of which he might not succeed in dragging him again for weeks to come.

"That is a very serious accusation to level against any man," he ventured to say.

"I wouldn't say it, if I were not sure," the newsvendor retorted dryly.

"I am certain of that," Gérard hastened to add. He had said the wrong thing apparently, for the old fellow's thin lips had suddenly closed as with a snap. He picked up a paper, unfolded it, and pretended to read: he took no more notice of Gérard, who vainly racked his brain for an inspiration of how to reawaken his communicative mood. At last he ventured on reiterating the leading question:

"What would you do, my friend, if you were twenty years younger? You said just now . . ."

The old man looked up at Gérard over the top of his spectacles. He crushed the paper into a ball and threw it on the floor: then he pushed his eccentric hat further down on the back of his head and said slowly:

"Yes, I did. I said that if I were twenty years younger I would stalk that traitor till I had seen him shot in the back like the felon that he is . . . But," he went on with a shrug and a nod, "I am nearly seventy and I could not face another deportation to Nouméa. . . ."

"If you came in contact with the police, you mean?"

"They would have me again—and I couldn't face it—not now—I am too old—and pluck has gone out of me."

"But if the man is a traitor—and you know it?"

"Well?"

"It is your duty to denounce him."

Then as the old man once more relapsed into silence, Gérard added:

"What exactly has the man done?"

An interruption caused by a group of chattering customers, who bought papers, wanted change for their money, and asked all sorts of irrelevant questions only served to heighten Gérard's impatience and his eagerness to hear more. As soon as the chatterers had gone, the old newsvendor leaned over his counter, his thin hands clasped together, he sank his voice to a whisper:

"You are young," he said, "you can do it."

"Do what?"

"Lay that devil by the heels—you are not afraid of going back to France?"

Then as Gérard, rather taken aback, made no immediate reply to this he went on, with a shrug:

"Oh, I know—I know—I have known it all along—I am no fool—and I ask no questions—but I know that a young man of your rank and education does not call himself Paul Gérard and live in Geneva from choice. But when I say that you are not afraid of going back to France, that is just guess-work."

"A pretty shrewd guess," Gérard admitted, "if——"

"If duty or patriotism called you," the old man broke in with something of a sneer: "were these the grand words you were going to use?"

"I don't think so," Gérard rejoined, smiling, "I think I was going to say necessity."

"Necessity? Well! I don't know about that—— It may be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"To stop that devil in his fiendish work."

Gérard's growing impatience gave itself vent in an angry exclamation; all this circumlocution and useless talk was beginning to exasperate him.

"In Heaven's name, man!" he cried, "are you ever going to tell me what the man has done?"

Of course the old scarecrow had something on his mind. That was obvious, also that he wanted to unburden his soul, that he wanted to confide some secret or other to the only friend he had in the world, but something held him back—fear probably. Gérard had done his best to encourage him, but being young and also deeply interested, he was losing patience. However the old newsvendor in response to his exclamation drew a deep sigh, his brows contracted above his beaky nose. He took off his funny hat,

threw it down on the counter, passed his hand repeatedly over his bald pate and said finally:

"It is difficult to explain what that Judas has actually done: but I'll try and make you understand. The man, you must know, is a French citizen, but he was not born in France, that may account for much. He is of the race that reckons money-making as the aim and object of every man's existence. I saw him here first as a youngish man, ten years ago: he hadn't a sou then and gave German and Italian lessons for a franc an hour and ran errands for a few centimes. To-day he wears an expensive coat worth more than he ever earned in a whole year in those days. I remember him well when first he jingled money in his pocket. That was two years ago nearly, and I wondered how it was that he had suddenly become prosperous. He never took any notice of me, even when he was poor. He just bought his paper when he could afford one and went his way without so much as a good morning."

The old man paused a moment, wiped his nose with the back of his gloved hand, and leaning over the counter with arms folded he gripped both his elbows with his hands. His pale eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles were fixed intently on Gérard.

"I had a customer here in Geneva," he resumed after a minute or two, "whom I only saw occasionally. He was a stiff, dried-up military man who spoke French with a marked German accent. He did not actually reside in Geneva—at least so I concluded—as I only saw him at intervals: but when he was here, he came every day to the kiosk. Despite his stiff, rather arrogant manner, he was always kind to me and generous with his money: he sometimes made me presents of his discarded clothes—the shoes I am wearing now were his gift—— And one day he asked me if I would like to earn a little money—quite honestly. Naturally I said yes, if the work whatever it was did not interfere with my little newspaper business, and was not hard for my age. He assured me that it was neither. All it meant was to take charge of certain correspondence of his: receive letters for him and take them to an address in Lausanne which he gave me. There I was to receive other letters from him, which I would have to post in Geneva. Every time I went up to Lausanne I would receive ten francs over and above my steam-boat fare. Would that suit me? he asked, and I readily said that it would."

Again the newsvendor paused. So far there was nothing exciting or intriguing in his story, but to say that Gérard was both intrigued and excited would be to put it far too mildly. The

evening was drawing in and the street lamps along the Grand Quai and up and down the bridges flickered in the cold vaporous air. Far away on the left the steam-boat from Lausanne was just becoming visible through the mist. A thin drizzle was beginning to fall. But Gérard was impervious to the weather: with his hands tucked in the pockets of his great coat, he leaned against the jamb of the kiosk, as near to the old man as he could, for the latter as he went on after a moment or two, hardly spoke above his breath.

"My customer," he said, "gave me his name as Colonel Marwitz: his letters used to come addressed to him *Kiosque du Jardin Anglais à Genève.* They came from different parts of the world, from France, from Italy, from Austria, the United States, Mexico, Argentina: and the letters which I put in the post for him here also came from all over the world. I would have been an imbecile, if I had not guessed the purport of this correspondence. Colonel Marwitz obviously belonged to the German secret service: Switzerland with its unassailable neutrality has been for years the happy hunting-ground of the spying system of every nation, and I suppose that to this German Colonel I was such an insignificant mudlark, that it never entered his head that I had a mind of my own and had guessed at once what his game was. Anyway he did not suspect me: he didn't imagine that I would betray him and I never did. He was a German and was presumably in the pay of his own country, so what he did was no business of mine.

"The whole thing went on for about six months. I went up to Lausanne on an average once a week and I was very thankful for the money I earned so easily. Then one day when I was coming away from Colonel Marwitz's apartment, after I had handed him his weekly correspondence, I met the man you saw here just now coming up the stairs. He passed me without taking any notice of me, and rang the Colonel's bell. I waited on the stairs long enough to see that he was immediately admitted; why I did that I don't know—it just struck me as funny that was all. It struck me as funnier still when less than a month later, I saw that man in a brand-new suit of clothes, swaggering up and down the Grand Quai at the fashionable hour, and when he stopped at my kiosk to buy the papers which had just come in from Paris, he took a handful of silver out of his pocket, in order to select the fifty centimes piece with which he paid for them. I saw him every day after that. He was no longer the down-at-heel vagabond I had known for the past ten years. He was prosperous. Very prosperous

indeed. He wore a new hat, and well-tailored clothes. He came in and out of the Hôtel de Russie as if he lived in that expensive hotel—and I wondered how the change in his fortunes had come about—— For a long time I only wondered—until one day at Lausanne, I saw him again—on Colonel Marwitz's doorstep. The Colonel had come to the door with him—and I heard the Colonel say: 'I shall expect that report not later than Tuesday' . . . Then I no longer wondered—I guessed."

The old man had just finished speaking when a crowd of English tourists came to a halt in front of the kiosk. They bought *The Times* and asked to see photographs of the Cathedral and the Hôtel de Ville. They were a long time selecting these, and as it was getting colder every moment Gérard stamped up and down the road to keep himself warm. The drizzle had turned to real, heavy rain and the evening was raw and damp, but Gérard would not have missed the rest of the story, even if he had been soaked to the skin while waiting for it.

At last the English tourists went away and Gérard once more took up his stand under the sheltering awning of the kiosk. The old man was busy putting his papers tidy, and for many minutes Gérard remained absorbed in his thoughts. After all what did the whole thing amount to? A man who had been a down-at-heel vagabond had suddenly become rich. There were a hundred ways in which a pauper might come into an unexpected fortune: by a heritage or winning the *gros lot* in a State lottery. There was nothing whatever to prove that this particular man was earning money by selling information to a foreign power. For that is what the old newsvendor had inferred when he saw him standing on the doorstep of the German colonel, and heard the latter make the remark "I shall expect that report not later than Tuesday." It was odd certainly. Very odd. But it proved nothing. And Gérard caught himself murmuring:

"It is only guess-work. It proves nothing."

After a few moments he said more audibly:

"It is all guess-work. You have no proof."

The old man heard him that time. He pushed the pile of papers to one side and rejoined dryly:

"No, but I could get it—if I were twenty years younger."

"How?"

"Come closer—I'll tell you."

Gérard stooped over the counter until his ear was on a level with the old man's thin lipped mouth.

"That limb of Satan," the latter began, dropping his voice to a

whisper, "goes to Lausanne about twice a month, but instead of doing the journey in the usual way, either by train, or the short trip by the steamboat along the north bank, he goes from here to Lausanne by the express-excursion boat which leaves here at a quarter past nine, and goes all round the lake calling at all the places of interest on the way. The boat reaches Lausanne in the late afternoon, and is back in Geneva at a quarter to eight in the evening. It is an excursion much favoured by tourists in fine weather, but whereas the direct way from here to Lausanne is a matter of a couple of hours, it takes, as you know, the best part of the day to go there right round the lake. And I have known that Judas board that boat when it was raining in torrents, freezing hard, or blowing a gale."

"That proves nothing," Gérard put in, "he may like the trip."

"He may," the other retorted dryly.

"Besides, how do you know that he gets off the boat at Lausanne?"

"Because he never returns to Geneva on her. He invariably comes by a late boat: I have seen him land here as late as eleven o'clock at night—— Besides, I have followed him."

"Oh?"

"More than once, too—I got the first inkling of his tactics one evening, about a couple of months ago. I had taken some letters to Lausanne for Colonel Marwitz and was waiting on the jetty for the excursion boat which was just about due, after its round-the-lake trip. Presently she came in, and to my astonishment among the passengers who disembarked was that abominable traitor. I say, to my astonishment, because that very morning I had seen him embark on that same boat at a quarter past nine. The weather had been positively cruel all day. It had poured in torrents since early morning, and no one in their senses would have gone for pleasure in such weather on an excursion lasting over ten hours. I naturally argued to myself that the man must have had a serious reason for doing it. I was very keen to know what that reason was. Wouldn't you have been?"

Gérard admitted that he would, and the old man went on:

"I had lately got to know a man, poorer than myself, who for a small consideration, was always willing to take charge of my newspapers whenever I had to go to Lausanne. So when one morning—about a week later, I saw the arch-villain come out of the Hôtel de Russie and make his way to the landing stage where the express boat starts for her round-the-lake trip, I got my friend

to look after the kiosk for the day, for I was determined to stalk my prey. The weather was mild and sunny and there was quite a crowd making its way down to the boat. I mingled with the crowd, always keeping that Judas in sight. He didn't see me: I don't suppose he would have troubled his head about me if he had. The first thing that struck me as odd was that he travelled second class."

"Lots of people do," Gérard remarked. "I have done it myself —I like to study the crowd . . ."

"You might. But that man doesn't care a brass farthing for the crowd. You have only to look at him. He is the sort who, now that he has become prosperous, would always engage the most expensive suite in an hotel and travel in one of those new luxury *wagons-lits*. So naturally I kept my eyes as open as I could, to see what was the reason of this unexpected move on his part."

"Well? and what was the reason?"

"I'll tell you . . . Until we came to Thonon nothing whatever happened. I never ceased to watch the man. He sat on one of the benches on deck, smoking a cigar. He spoke to no one, took no notice of anyone. Passengers disembarked at the various stopping places on the way. Others came on board. He never as much as glanced up at them. Then, at Thonon, where we arrived an hour before noon, a shabbily dressed woman came on board; she came up on the second-class deck, walked up and down for a time, and presently she sat down on the bench next to the man. As I say, I never took my eyes off him for long, and I did not fail to notice that he sidled away a little so as to make room for her: an act of courtesy which a man of his stamp would never have done towards a shabbily dressed, middle-aged woman. It was enough to stimulate my attention. At first the two of them took no notice of one another. They sat side by side: he smoking his cigar, she, quite still, her hands in shabby cotton gloves clasped over the handle of a market basket which she kept on her knee.

"After a time she apparently made some remark. He turned his head and looked at her, for all the world as if he thought her impertinent for daring to speak to him. I tell you it was as good as a play to watch those two—a thrilling play which keeps the looker-on on tenterhooks as to what is going to happen next. She did not seem abashed by his haughty stare—made another remark, and presently dived into her market basket, and out of it she took a parcel of provisions—sandwiches—and began to munch. You can guess what happened—she offered him the parcel of sandwiches—he took one, and with it a folded paper that lay beneath it. He

consumed the sandwich—made a show of crumpling up the paper, toyed with it for a few minutes and finally, with very well-assumed thoughtlessness, he thrust it into his coat-pocket."

"You are sure?" Gérard queried, for the newsvendor had paused and was peering at him over his glasses, as if to see what effect the amazing story had upon his hearer.

"As sure as I am standing here," the old man replied. "But wait a moment, let me finish. The woman got off the steamer at Evian and the man went on to Lausanne—disembarked and went straight to Colonel Marwitz's apartment."

"You followed him?"

"Of course."

"And you think . . ."

"I don't think," the old newsvendor broke in hotly, "I know . . ."

"But you have done nothing," Gérard retorted.

"What could I do?"

"Go to the police—tell them what you have seen."

"What does the Swiss police care about German intrigues and French traitors? They would have told me to mind my own business, and put me down as an imbecile or a lunatic."

"And you have told nobody but me?"

"Nobody . . ."

"Although you are so sure?"

"Are you trying to doubt it?" the old man retorted. "Isn't is as clear as daylight? The woman brings the information to her accomplice—how she gets it one doesn't know—and he passes it on to the enemies of France. And that has been going on for months—and the devil only knows what mischief has already been done! You can imagine those reports—plans of new guns or of fortifications—composition of army corps—disposal of artillery—frontier defences. The Germans pay well and their spy system is the finest in the world . . ."

Then as Gérard remained silent, brooding, seemingly absorbed in thought, the newsvendor went on more vehemently still.

"What are you going to do about it, M. Gérard? You are young and you are a Frenchman. Are you going to allow these foul traiors to connive at their country's defeat—at her humiliation—her ruin, and not raise one finger to stop them?"

Gradually he had raised his voice, until these last few words rang out like a shrill scream, above the confused sound of traffic. Gérard roused from his brown study, put a restraining hand on his arm. The poor old man, carried away by emotion, was trem-

bling from head to foot. Two gendarmes went by and cast a quick glance into the kiosk. But the old scarecrow had been a feature of the quayside for so long, his eccentric appearance and funny ways were so well known in Geneva, that at sight of him the men merely smiled, shrugged and passed on.

CHAPTER 31

It was not until the small hours of the morning that Gérard finally went to bed. He had spent hours walking up and down the Quai and round about the town, unconscious of cold, of fatigue or of hunger. The heavy rain had once more turned to a thin drizzle, of the kind that soaks through everything, right down to the skin. Gérard had had no dinner. As a matter of fact he could not have swallowed a morsel. His valet, a stodgy Swiss, but quite devoted to him in a stolid way, had just made up his mind to take counsel with the police when he heard his master's latchkey turn in the lock.

But bed was no use to Gérard. His thoughts were in too great a whirl and his nerves too taut for sleep. The newsvendor's story had thrilled him to the marrow. The idea of such systematic, abominable treachery made him long for the day when he could hear of the Judas being delivered over to the justice of his country, and shot in the back like the contemptible traitor that he was. He no longer doubted the story: it was too obviously true. Something, of course, would have to be done to check the traitor's activities; the question was, what? and by whom? Somehow, although he fought against the idea, Gérard's mind harked back throughout the night on the old man's suggestion, uttered in a tone almost of bitter reproach: "You are young—you are a Frenchman—what are you going to do about it?" and, not unnaturally perhaps, the suggestion got mixed up in Gérard's consciousness with Lorendana —his wife—and with the insult which he had levelled against her, when he taunted her with her filthy trade.

Now, while he paced restlessly up and down the deserted quay, and the drizzle covered his hat and his shoulders with vaporous moisture, the question kept on recurring in his mind over and over again: "Was that trade so filthy after all?" and the only

reply to the question seemed to be: "It depends whether you work for your country or against her."

During those few maddening moments in the Hôtel d'Egypte, when, rendered almost insane with warring passions, he had taunted Juanita with being in the pay of Toulon, she had replied bravely:

"I serve my country as best I can."

Was that the answer to the torturing enigma?

He was young. He was active. He cared nothing about life and would welcome danger.

Was it such a filthy trade, after all?

He would not do it for money, of course. But without the money, was the trade any less filthy? To track a human being down, as a hound tracks the fox: to be the direct cause of bringing a fellow-man to a violent death . . . was that filthy in itself—without the money? Lorendana had done it for money—when she was poor. . . . She had done it for the sake of a name, a position in society, for wealth and independence. She had all that now: everything a woman could wish. Did she still ply her trade for her country's sake? Would she still reply bravely when taunted: "I serve my country as best I can."

The old newsvendor, of course, didn't come into the question. He was old and he was afraid. He could not or would not face a convict's life again, or a shot in the back. With all his love of France, and all his hatred for the traitor, he would not face that danger. And Gérard thought him, not exactly a coward, since he was old and had suffered so much, but certainly a weakling. Then, if it was the act of a senile weakling to shirk a task because of the danger involved in it, was it not the act of a coward for a young man to shirk it?

What a problem! My God, what a problem!

* * * * *

The morning came and Gérard had found no answer to the nerve-racking question . . . no absolutely convincing answer, that is. He thought of himself as a leaf blown hither and thither by the wind.

"De ta tige détachée, pauvre feuille désséchée
Où vas-tu? Je n'en sais rien.
.....
.....
Je vais où va toute chose, où va la feuille de rose
Et la feuille du laurier."

The wind of chance. The day wore on—forenoon, noon, afternoon—and as afternoon faded into evening, Gérard became more and more convinced that the ultimate decision would not rest with him but with destiny.

And destiny ordained it that in the late evening he should be looking out of his window at the precise moment when the last boat came in from Lausanne. It was then a quarter before eleven. The landing-stage where the passengers disembarked was immediately opposite Gérard's apartment, and he watched in a desultory manner the crowd of men and women as they crossed the gangway, gave up their landing-tickets, and then made their way in one direction or another. The weather had, quite unexpectedly, turned warm and very fine, and the evening was beautiful. The moon in its second quarter shed an exquisite light over the Ile Rousseau. On the Quai its light vied with that of the street lamps. The crowd made a compact mass at first, the men with their coats thrown jauntily open, the women with their flounced pelerines and diminutive parasols; then they dispersed, and the kiosk at the corner of the Jardin Anglais remained in full view. One or two of the passengers stopped to buy a paper—and suddenly, among these, Gérard recognised the big man in the expensively tailored coat, the hero of the old newsvendor's amazing story.

The window of Gérard's sitting-room opened on to a balcony, and he stepped out into the open so as to get a better view of that man, and see in which direction he would go. Gérard saw him walk along the Grand Quai and turn into the Hôtel de Russie close by.

Ten minutes later Gérard was sitting in the lounge of the same hotel, having ordered an apéritif. The man had taken off his coat and was sitting in an easy chair close by, also with an apéritif at his elbow. He was smoking a cigar, and was immersed in the perusal of the *Petit Journal*. Gérard had also bought a paper on his way, and after the waiter had brought him his apéritif he, too, appeared deeply engrossed in reading the news of the day.

With outward carelessness, he took comprehensive stock of the man. Studied him intently. He was stout and dark: so dark indeed that he might be called swarthy; he had a fleshy nose and large, protruding dark eyes, with opaque yellowish white rims round the iris. The lower part of his face was masked by a heavy black moustache and side-whiskers, between which his shaven chin protruded. The top of his head was bald, but from ear to ear he had a fringe of thick, curly, jet-black hair that fell over his collar. His voice, when he spoke to the waiter in French, was thick and

throaty, with a very slight foreign intonation. Gérard at once put him down as a Levantine Jew. Somehow he got the feeling that he had seen that swarthy face before; those eyes which looked like dark marbles seemed to rouse in him a dormant memory.

And suddenly, in course of conversation with the waiter, the man said something about *la France* and *la patrie*. Gérard did not catch what it was, but at once he remembered. He remembered that awful journey between Paris and the Belgian frontier, nearly two years ago: the fat man and the thin, rabbit-faced one: their blatant talk of patriotism, and discussions about business and the specification ostensibly for clips that would keep the evening tie in place, and which proved to be drawings and notes of a highly technical character. And he remembered Anna, the poor woman with the shabby bonnet, and the pathetic eyes, and her look of terror when she snatched the mysterious document out of his hands. The man had been clean-shaven then, save for a moustache; he had worn a toupé of wavy black hair over his bald cranium, but it was the same face and he could not disguise his eyes, nor subdue his throaty voice.

Gérard watched him, as he rose, having finished his apéritif, and strolled across the lounge towards the grand staircase, and presently disappeared up the stairs. Gérard then paid for his drink and crossed over to the reception desk. He entered into light conversation with the clerk, asked one or two desultory questions about the clients of the hotel, and finally elicited the information that the stout, dark gentleman who had just gone upstairs was M. Biot, *commerçant* of Nancy, France, now retired with a considerable fortune. He had one of the best suites in the hotel, the one with a private bathroom all in the latest English style. He drank champagne at every meal and his tips to the staff were on a lavish scale.

Gérard thanked the clerk, and then went back to his apartment to have a quiet think.

CHAPTER

32

Nothing happened for the next few days. The old newsvendor was apparently busy with accounts, for whenever Gérard went to the kiosk to buy his papers, his beaky nose was bent over a ledger, and he did no more than glance up for a few seconds and take the centimes from Gérard in payment for the papers.

As for the man in the expensive coat—"Biot, *commerçant*," as he styled himself—he seemed to pursue the even tenor of his luxurious life. Gérard took to dropping in at the Hôtel de Russie for a meal or an apéritif; he invariably saw "M. Biot" there at lunch or dinner, or sitting in the lounge, smoking and reading a paper. He was always alone.

One day the newsvendor, as soon as he saw Gérard approaching the kiosk, closed and put away his ledger, and said: "I am going to Lausanne to-day." And Gérard went with him. They went by train. A matter of three hours. Colonel Marwitz's apartment was situated at Ouchy, not very far from the port, in a tree-bordered avenue that overlooked the grounds of the newly-built luxury hotel. Gérard had wished to see exactly where he lived and in what style. He was lucky. The Colonel happened to be in the hall of his apartment when his valet opened the door in response to the newsvendor's ring at the bell and Gérard caught a glimpse of the stiff, soldierly figure of the German secret service agent. That he was in the secret service and probably of high rank in it there could be no doubt: somehow his face proclaimed it. It was entirely expressionless, as if a thin coating of parchment had been drawn over it, obliterating all the lines.

Every morning after that, at about half-past eight o'clock, Gérard took his stand on the balcony of his apartment, dressed in a shabby suit which he had purchased at a second-hand clothes shop: the coat was out-at-elbows, the trousers frayed at the bottom: he wore a battered hat and shoes, the uppers of which had parted company from the soles. He smeared his chin and face with black to make them appear unshaven and he pulled a strand of hair down over his forehead.

From the balcony he could watch the passengers embarking on the express boat, and there he stayed until the very last moment, when the boat was actually on the point of starting.

One morning—it was just a fortnight or so after he had listened to the newsvendor's amazing story—he caught sight of "M. Biot" in among the crowd of intending passengers. It had struck nine a few moments ago, and the boat would be starting in about ten minutes. Gérard rammed his battered hat down over his eyes, and ran down to the Quai. As he passed close to the kiosk, he saw the old man, leaning with both elbows over his counter. He gave a quick glance at Gérard and equally quickly looked away, but Gérard knew that the newsvendor had recognised him, had seen him probably before now standing on the balcony in these same shabby clothes, and that he had guessed his purpose, for there was a look of grim satisfaction on the wizened face and it almost seemed to Gérard, that he heard a kind of waggish chuckle, as he hurried by.

* * * * *

The incidents of the journey were exactly the same as those which the newsvendor had described. "M. Biot," in his magnificent suit of clothes and smoking an expensive cigar, took a second-class ticket, made his way aft and sat down on a bench on the second-class deck. He took a paper out of his pocket and was soon immersed in reading. At the various stopping-places when a crowd of passengers came on board, he did not even glance up from his paper.

Then came the halt at Thonon. Gérard, on the qui vive, watched the passengers as they came in single file down the gangway. And all at once he saw her—the woman! There was no mistaking her. The alpaca gown and pélerine green with age, the black straw bonnet very much the worse for wear, with its shabby lace lapels fastened over her flat bosom with a jet brooch: the same clothes seemingly as those she had worn two years ago. It was Anna all right enough: Anna of the thin, sallow face and red-tipped nose, and strange, arresting personality. Gérard had perforce to restrain himself, for he had been on the point of jumping up and greeting her as a friend. Her thin hands, innocent of gloves, were blue with the cold, and she carried the same market basket, out of which protruded one or two paper parcels.

Anna!

For Gérard the intervening days and months seemed to fade away at sight of her. He lived again in a few brief minutes the

whole of that awful day. The train journey from Paris, with his whole nervous system on the jar, his every sinew aching with the strain of that agonising interview. The hubbub around him seemed to die away, the whirl of the water under the paddle of the boat seemed to reiterate with maddening monotony Juanita's fateful words: "I do not love you—please go!"

He watched Anna and that preposterous Biot with dreamy eyes: eyes that were looking into the past. She walked up and down the deck for some time, then appeared to be looking about her for a seat. A moment or two later she was sitting on the bench beside "M. Biot," and all at once there came into her plain, pinched face that expression of dog-like devotion and contentment which rendered it almost beautiful. The man took no notice of her—he went on smoking and reading his papers: but she looked perfectly happy, and Gérard could see her sidling up against his arm, trying to get as close to him as she dared, and he was conscious once more, as he had been that day at Feignies, of a frantic desire to knock the egregious fellow down.

After this everything happened just as the newsvendor had described it. Anna took a parcel out of her basket and munched sandwiches. He put down his paper and threw the stump of his cigar away: she entered into conversation with him, timidly at first, then more boldly, and finally offered him a sandwich; he took one, and then another. It was with these, of course, that she succeeded in passing some report or other into his hands.

At Evian she got off the boat. Gérard saw her step off the gangway and turn with the other passengers into the passport office. He would have given much to be able to follow her, to keep on her tracks rather than on those of "M. Biot," whose itinerary and movements were known to him through the newsvendor's graphic story. But, as he had no passport, he would, of course, not be allowed to land, nevertheless he had a vague feeling that he wanted to see her again, to speak with her, to show her some kind of sympathy and understanding. She would need both, he reflected, when the end came—the inevitable end, when she would need all the comfort that it was humanly possible for any man to offer.

* * * * *

Lausanne was reached round about seven o'clock. The shades of evening were rapidly drawing in and the lights of the city were flickering dimly through the rising mist. Gérard welcomed the oncoming darkness.

"M. Biot" got off the boat and Gérard followed him. It is doubtful whether at the moment he did this with any definite intention. For days now, ever since that fateful afternoon when the newsvendor had thrown him the challenge: "You are young! What are you going to do about it?" he had felt his own volition to be adrift, like a leaf blown about by the wind of destiny. He had followed "M. Biot" to the boat, he had indeed bought the shabby second-hand suit, smeared over his face, and employed all the tricks of disguise that he had ever heard of, but he had done it without fixed determination to act in any particular way. The sight of Anna and the memories which her appearance evoked had sent his thoughts whirling in all sorts of directions. Vaguely he knew in his own mind that the systematic treasonable correspondence betweeen "M. Biot" and the German agent must be stopped, and the crime brought home to the traitor, but he had made no plan as to how this was to be brought about. He knew that he must by hook or by crook have proof of the man's treachery, but even while he kept on his tracks, he had no idea how those proofs were to be obtained.

"Pauvre feuille détachée, où vas-tu?"

"Je n'en sais rien."

He didn't know whither the wind of chance would tend.

"M. Biot" had gone on for about a couple of hundred metres up the street, when he once more turned sharp to the left into a fairly broad avenue bordered with young trees. Gérard at once recognised it as the street in which the German colonel's apartment was situated. It ran for some distance behind the grounds of the new hotel, several windows of which showed lights from within. Otherwise the avenue was rather dark. On the right were a few isolated buildings, all newly erected, each standing in its own plot of ground. The street lamps with their fan-shaped gas-burners stood at several metres distance one from the other. The noise of traffic, the clatter of horses' hoofs, cracks of whip and rumble of wheels over on the *quai* or up the Avenue d'Ouchy only reached this backwater as a confused murmur. It was an aristocratic quarter, lonely, exclusive and quiet.

"M. Biot," his head bent, his hands buried in the pockets of his overcoat, his walking-stick showing over his shoulder like the muzzle-end of a gun, was walking at a slow pace, and presently he came to a halt. The house where the colonel lived was still distant about another hundred metres. "M. Biot" had paused immediately beneath one of the street lamps. Gérard, several paces behind him, withdrew into the densest shadow and watched. He

saw the man take a paper out of his pocket, unfold it and immerse himself in the reading of it.

The winds of chance had suddenly given Gérard's volition a definite direction. He threw a quick glance up and down the avenue. There was no one in sight. He bounded out of the shadows, and the next moment his young athletic arms were round the neck of "M. Biot" who, taken off his guard, lost his footing. Gérard had him down in a few quick seconds. Smothering his attempt at a call with one hand, he seized the paper with the other, and tore down the street, before the other was able to struggle to his feet, or his cries of "*Au voleur!*" reached the ears of some gendarmes or passers-by.

Gérard, his elbows close to his sides, the paper safely bestowed in an inner pocket of his coat, ran on. He had been a champion runner in his schooldays, and he covered the ground in real championship style. Crossing the well frequented Avenue d'Ouchy at walking pace so as not to attract attention, he turned into the road that took him up the hill at running pace to the new Federal Railway Station.

There was no longer any fear of pursuit. Before "M. Biot" could possibly come to himself, before he could attract attention with his cries and explain what had happened, a great many minutes had of course gone by; nor could he have the slightest inkling of the appearance of his aggressor. Gérard, slightly out of breath from running up the long hill, could come to a halt with safety, and after a moment or two was able to walk unconcernedly into the station, take his ticket and lose himself in the crowd of second-class passengers who were waiting for the train.

* * * * *

It was not till he was safely back in his own apartment that Gérard ventured to unfold the paper which he had snatched out of "M. Biot's" hand. Like everything else connected with his adventures of the day, the document brought back memories of Feignies, of poor Anna with her bonnet awry, her market basket and paper parcels strewn over the permanent way, and of her agonising cries: "That paper, Monsieur—it is mine—you have no right . . ."

But now he studied the paper with more care than he had done then. And though there were many technicalities set down in it, he understood it a great deal better. He had heard and read a great deal—as indeed most people had—about a new gun, made up of a certain number of small cannons placed in juxtaposition,

which could be discharged one after the other with great rapidity, by means of a special mechanical device. This engine of war had recently been brought to perfection by a French captain of artillery, and secret trials of it had been conducted at Meudon during the past year, under the supervision of the Emperor. The document which Gérard had filched from "M. Biot," and which the latter was obviously about to hand over to the German secret service agent, contained all the technical details relating to this gun, together with plans and elaborate drawings of its various parts and mechanism.

Gérard, having satisfied himself that this was really so, put the paper in an envelope and laid it under his pillow for the night.

CHAPTER 33

Mme. la Vicomtesse de Lanoy had just completed her morning toilet when M. Lucien Toulon, *directeur du Cabinet Secret de Sa Majesté*, sent in his card with the request for a brief interview. The time had long passed away since Lorendana the dancer waited on M. Toulon at his bureau to receive her instructions. She was a great lady now who could not be seen stepping out of her elegant brougham save outside the Tuileries or one of the mansions of the Faubourg St. Germain.

The boudoir in which she received M. le directeur du *Cabinet Secret* was just as artistically and far more expensively furnished than the one she had in the Rue Grenelle; her apartment was on the first floor of a house, which was next-door to the *palais* of the Duc de Valmore, one of the richest peers of France. Two footmen in sober, elegant livery ushered M. Toulon into the presence of Mme. la Vicomtesse, and saw the great personage bend his broad back nearly double while he kissed the beautiful hand which was graciously extended to him.

Despite the mildness of this spring morning, a small fire of aromatic wood burned in the grate, diffusing a delicate perfume through the room. Papa Toulon sat down in the chair which his hostess indicated to him. He folded his podgy hands over his abdomen and surveyed with perfect complacence the exquisite picture which she presented—she, the woman who had become his

right hand in the difficult tasks that fell to his lot; the perfect tool, of which he had already made such portentous use.

The past two years had wrought a great change in Juanita Lorendana, the one-time dancer of provincial café-concerts. Womanlike she had assimilated the ways and appearance of a *grande dame* as if to the manner born. She was always beautiful, sinuous and charming, but there was now a certain reserve in her manner, a certain condescension towards those whose social position was inferior to that of the widowed Vicomtesse de Lanoy. That condescension had even been apparent when she greeted him, Lucien Toulon, her employer and paymaster. But he didn't mind that. On the contrary he felt at home in this atmosphere of elegance, which he himself had created for this pearl of great price who was his subordinate.

How beautiful she was! How alive! Charm, breeding, the power to enslave men—she had all that and more. As usual, she was dressed in the latest mode; her chestnut hair was combed upwards above her temples, and frizzled in light locks in front. The firelight played upon her gown of supple Nankin silk shot with green; she had on a high bodice and long sleeves of white muslin and, round her waist, a black satin sash ending in a large bow at the back. And Papa Toulon gazed with pleasure on the richness of her attire, her dainty shoes of Russia leather, the long ear-rings of emeralds and brilliants, the brooch, the precious rings which she wore, for it was he who was paying for all that, he who decked out his favourite mannequin with all the gewgaws, the silks and satins which made her the envy of other women, and made her welcome in the most exclusive *salons* of the *beau-monde*.

The estates of the "late" Vicomte de Lanoy were yielding a finer revenue than Lucien Toulon had originally been led to expect. Everything the unfortunate young man had possessed had been confiscated by the State; quite a good share of the capital had been remitted to him; as for the rest, it was being administered for the benefit of "his widow." By "administered" was meant, however, that no actual rights had been made over to her. The *Cabinet Secret* had, in the name of the State, full control over the estate and its revenues; and at any moment supplies could be either curtailed or altogether withdrawn if the lady did not fulfil to the satisfaction of her chief the duties she had undertaken.

* * * * *

That was the situation, and Juanita was fully conscious of it, even while she leaned back in her chair, aware of Lucien Toulon's

admiration, accepting it as a tribute to her beauty and her powers, all the more flattering as it came from the man who had once looked on her as a mere tool, and now was ready to acknowledge that she was indispensable to him in his work; accepting it, too, not as a dependent from her paymaster, but as one who gave just as much as she received. She arranged the folds of her gown to the best advantage; she rested her elbow on the arm of the chair, and her cheek against her hand, and crossed her feet so as to show just as much of her dainty shoes as was necessary to make a perfect picture. Then, when she thought that Papa Toulon had gazed his fill on her, she asked him abruptly:

"Well, my friend, and what brings you here at this hour of the morning?"

He replied curtly: "Business."

"Of course," she said, "but what business?"

By way of answer Lucien Toulon allowed the monocle to drop from his eye, and took a paper out of his coat-pocket. It was a letter, which bore a foreign stamp. Toulon extracted it from its envelope and handed it across to Juanita.

She took it and read it through once, and then again. Her face while she read took on an expression of concentrated attention; a deep frown appeared between her brows. When she had finished reading the letter a second time, she looked up at Toulon, handed him back the letter, and asked:

"Have you got the drawing this refers to?"

He dived once more into his coat-pocket and half drew out an important-looking document.

"Do you wish to see it?" he asked.

"No," she replied; "I shouldn't understand it. But is it all that the letter indicates?"

He nodded: "Yes!" and she went on:

"Well, what is your next move?"

"To find out, of course, how the drawings came into the hands of this man Biot. Everything to do with the gun has been kept such a close secret that only an army man in a very high position could possibly have supplied the drawings."

"Have you anyone in mind?"

"Not exactly. But the field is narrow."

"And this—what's his name—this Biot?" she asked after a slight pause—"have you any idea who he is?"

"I have a shrewd suspicion. You will remember that about two years ago, when Colonel Verchère demonstrated his first improvements on the old mitrailleuse, we found out that certain reports

concerning them got into the hands of one of Bismarck's agents. We suspected then that the traitor's field of operation was Belgium, and after a time we got on the track of a very cleverly forged passport issued in the name of Hector Folay, officer (retired) in the 51st regiment of infantry, born at Nancy of French father and mother. You remember?"

"I think I do."

"You would have cause to," Lucien Toulon rejoined dryly. "It occurred at the time of your marriage to the defunct Vicomte de Lanoy."

"Quite so," she said coolly.

Toulon gave a bland smile and went on:

"There were three confederates in the business then—a woman and two men. They crossed over into Belgium and back again fairly frequently. We never traced the woman. But we got one of the men, a puny, rabbit-faced fellow, whom we shot. It seems, however, that we shot the wrong man," Papa Toulon remarked casually, "for the self-styled officer of infantry soon resumed his activities."

"The same man, you think?"

"I do. After we collared his confederate he ceased to come to France. Round about the same time Bismarck's agent in Brussels, a certain Colonel Marwitz, was transferred to Switzerland, and I am practically certain that the Biot, retired commerçant of Nancy, mentioned in this letter is the Folay of two years ago."

"Settled in Switzerland?"

"In Geneva apparently. The place is a regular hot-bed of spies of every nation—we have an agent there ourselves."

Juanita pointed to the letter.

"Did your agent write that?" she asked.

"No. That is the funny part. This is an anonymous denunciation. I haven't any idea at present who wrote it."

"It is explicit at any rate."

"Very circumstantial. It mentions this—er—Biot by name—describes his method of work——"

"Not very fully," she remarked.

Lucien Toulon picked up his monocle, and fixed it in his eye. He referred to the letter.

"Here you have it," he said, and proceeded to read an extract from it:

"The writer has reason to know that Biot goes to Lausanne on an average twice a month, but instead of doing the short

trip, which takes about three hours by way of the railroad or by water, he embarks on the excursion boat which leaves here in the morning and takes the whole day to make a tour of the lake, stopping at various places on the way. At Thonon he is met by a confederate who boards the steamer there, contrives after a time to get into conversation with him, and disembarks again at Evian. Biot then goes on to Lausanne, which is not reached till seven o'clock in the evening . . .

"and so on," Papa Toulon concluded, and thrust the letter back into his pocket. "This anonymous friend of ours followed the man to Lausanne, and in the dark fell on him and filched the document which the confederate had handed over to him on board the boat. That is clear enough, isn't it?"

"Yes," Juanita mused. "But I wonder——"

"What?"

"Why the writer doesn't say anything about the confederate. We don't even know if it is a man or a woman."

Papa Toulon shrugged.

"Oh, there's nothing in that," he said lightly; "the writer is an amateur at the game. He takes it for granted that I shall know—or rather guess."

"What?"

"That the confederate is a man. He would have mentioned the fact if it had been a woman."

"You think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Well, no!" Juanita replied. "I think that the writer, being as you say an amateur at the game, recoiled at the thought of giving away a woman."

The monocle once more dropped out of M. Toulon's eye, and his fat, round face beamed at the beautiful woman before him; his beady eyes glistened with whole-hearted admiration.

"Isn't she wonderful!" he murmured, as if challenging an unseen audience to assert the contrary.

"Now would you be very surprised," he continued, "if I told you that as a matter of fact I thought this letter had been written by a woman?"

"I should be," she assented—"very."

"But why?"

"Because, my friend, such a supposition on your part would argue that your powers of intuition are getting seriously impaired; and I couldn't begin to think of such a calamity."

"You are joking," M. Toulon retorted, obviously nettled.

"I was never so serious in my life."

"You must admit that women are more given to writing anonymous letters than men."

"I do admit that."

"And that I could name you a whole string of motives that could have dictated this one."

"Of course you could."

"Well, then?"

"The wording of the letter does not suggest a woman to me," Juanita said thoughtfully. She paused for a second or two and then resumed again: "Anyway that is my opinion, and perhaps I am wrong—I would not attempt to vie with your master-mind, and your experience in such matters . . ."

Lucien Toulon made no comment on this; he sat silent for a time; his fat, bland face wore an air of indecision which was almost comic, as indecision was the very last thing that ever troubled him. Juanita allowed her gaze to rest on him, with a quaintly sarcastic expression in her eyes and around her lips. He certainly did look very funny at this moment, did Papa Toulon, with that air of indecision in his beady eyes; the coarse hair on his chin, bristling like the beard of a billy-goat; his podgy hands resting on his short, fat thighs, and his little feet turned toes inwards and beating an impatient tattoo on the carpet. Every now and then he would dart a quick, inscrutable glance at this woman —his subordinate—who had ventured to mock him.

He was certainly worried over this affair. It was going to be difficult, and he required Lorendana's co-operation to carry it through successfully. He had received the anonymous communication this very morning. It had come by ordinary post from Geneva, and he had hastened with it to her because he felt that it would not be a case of merely giving orders to a competent member of his staff, but that he really required counsel from what he was wont to term the best brains in the service. But now her assumption of superiority no longer pleased him. Greatly as he admired her, he would not for a moment allow any of his staff, not even this one, to assume any kind of superiority over him. Juanita, he reflected, had been rather tiresome of late. Not that she had refused to obey orders—she hadn't done that yet—but somehow Papa Toulon felt that there was insubordination in the air. He was so sensitive, was Papa Toulon, where pretty women were concerned, and it would have cut him to the heart to exercise severity over this one. But it was just on the cards—just on the

cards—that she was getting tired of work—that some rich amateur perhaps had offered her to cast widowhood aside and to change her name for one as distinguished as the one she now bore—in which case—oh, Papa Toulon would have hated to exercise severity!—it would mean exposure for her—humiliation—scandal—something worse than that probably—Papa Toulon had in his service men who could be counted on to put a bullet into that lovely head. It would have cut him to the heart—but he could not tolerate insubordination. He was the master, those whom he paid were his servants, and they were bound to obedience on pain of . . .

No doubt some of these reflections which coursed through the chief's brain found their expression in his large face and in the glitter of his eyes. Juanita, whose principal study of late had been her fellow-men and women, must of course have guessed what was in his mind. Certain it is that when she met the glance of those sharp, beady eyes, she closed her own, and a slight shudder came creeping up her spine. Lucien Toulon took note of that telltale shudder; it was as it should be; the mutinous spirit was giving way to cold reason. And it was in order to drive the lesson home that he now decided to shed his accustomed benevolence, and with a voice less smooth, and a manner less unctuous, he resumed presently:

"The question of the writer's sex is not of paramount importance for the moment. We'll ascertain that soon enough. What we want first of all is to get this Biot out of Switzerland, where we can't get at him, and lure him over the frontier where we can."

Then, as she made no reply, he went on in an authoritative, businesslike tone:

"For this work I have of course chosen you. You will proceed to Geneva . . ." He paused a moment and then concluded: "The rest I leave to you."

There was silence in the elegant little boudoir after that. Juanita was staring into the fire, and Lucien Toulon was staring at her. He studied the beautiful face, trying to gather from its expression what mood in her had been aroused by his peremptory order. As she didn't say anything, he put the question to her:

"Well, what do you say?"

She gave a slight shrug and replied coolly:

"Nothing. I've had my orders. When do I start?"

Lucien Toulon did not betray the satisfaction which he felt at this unexpectedly easy acquiescence.

"Whenever it suits you best," he said suavely.

"I must go to the Empress's rout on Thursday," she said. "It would seem strange if I left before——"

"Of course it would. Then shall we say Saturday? To-day week?"

"Why not?"

"I have no fear that the man Biot will do more mischief just now. He is sure to lie low, for a time at any rate."

"I think so too."

"Then we'll settle on Saturday. You will take your maid with you, of course. I know I can trust her, and you like her, do you not?"

"It doesn't come into the question, does it?" she said, "whether I like the woman whom you have set to spy upon me, or whether I don't."

But this insinuation appeared greatly to distress Papa Toulon, and he made visible efforts to tone his voice to its most unctuous pitch.

"Tut, tut!" he said, and raised one podgy hand in protest; "why will you always misunderstand me? Spy upon you indeed! A great lady like you must have a maid and obviously neither of us could risk having a woman near you who might be paid by an agent of an enemy power—or——"

"Let's say no more about it," she broke in curtly. She had spoken with a certain acerbity. The storm was not quite over yet; there were still signs of disturbance in the atmosphere. But Papa Toulon did not shed his benevolent manner; he put on the air of a worthy family doctor speaking to a sick child, or to a favourite patient suffering from nerves. He readjusted the monocle in his eye and beamed—absolutely beamed—on Juanita.

"But are you pleased to go?" he asked in his most unctuous tone. "I should hate it if——"

"Yes, I am pleased to go," she broke in curtly; "anyhow I am ready. There is nothing else you want to say to me, is there?"

She made a movement as if to rise. M. Lucien Toulon, director of His Majesty's Secret Cabinet, was being dismissed. But now he didn't mind. Bless you! he didn't mind a bit. She really was wonderful this Lorendana—the ex-dancer whom he had dragged out of provincial slums and of whom he had made a great lady, who would carry on to absolute perfection the work he had assigned to her. He took the hint and rose. The interview had gone off far better than he had anticipated. There was no doubt that of late he had detected faint signs of rebellion in the lovely lady, and even to-day he had been forced to check a certain air

which he never would have tolerated in anyone but her. But, bless her heart! great ladies must have the megrims sometimes. In fact, it was a sign of high breeding to have megrims; other female members of Papa Toulon's staff never had them, and he didn't think any the better of them for the omission.

All was well now, even though Papa Toulon felt rather exhausted with the constraint he had been forced to put upon himself so as not to provoke her into actual mutiny. Heavens above! that would have been a calamity! What would he have done without her in this Biot affair which only a woman of her fascinating personality could possibly carry through? Papa Toulon was perspiring profusely, but his fat face now wore the blandest of smiles. Again he bent his broad back nearly double as he kissed that most beautiful hand.

"Have you everything you want for your journey?" he asked as soon as he had straightened out his back once more, and with an air of paternal affection he patted her hand gently. But Lorendana quietly withdrew her hand.

"Everything, thank you," she said coldly.

"I'll send Prévost round this evening with your papers—money—draft on Geneva—a passport in the name of shall we say Mme. d'Orville?"

"If you like."

"My men will be at Evian, in our passport office, waiting for M. Biot, when he comes on shore with you. After your arrival in Geneva they will watch every boat that comes up to the jetty. That will be the best for you, I think."

"Yes," she said, "it will."

"And in the meanwhile, if you can come on the track of the confederate, you will of course let me know."

"Of course."

"Then all I can do," Papa Toulon concluded, with suave politeness, "is to wish you *bon voyage*."

She said: "Thank you!" quite coolly, rose and touched the bell.

The two elegant liveried servants showed M. Lucien Toulon out of the apartment.

* * * * *

For many minutes after Lucien Toulon had gone Juanita remained standing in front of the fire. She rested her toe on the curb of the hearth, and stared down into the flames. She felt cold and dispirited. Life seemed to hold nothing for her now. The excitement which had put zest into her, in the early days of her

association with the secret service had long since died down. Now only the ashes of it remained—the sense of duty to her employer who had done so much for her, who trusted her, and believed in her: the cold satisfaction of being of service to her country, and of unmasking those traitors who worked for her destruction —but these were only dead ashes, in comparison with what a young, ardent and beautiful woman could expect of life. Once—not so very long ago—she had met a man to whom, almost at sight, she had given her love. These things did happen, for indeed there appeared to be no reason why Gérard de Lanoy should all in a moment have become the master of her soul. It happened that night at Lyons, when he, alone amongst a thousand, had appeared indifferent to her charm, and became an accomplished fact when three days later she had stood beside him at the Fosse de la Part Dieu looking down on the lifeless body of his friend. She had had nothing to do with Pierre du Pont-Croix's fate, but Gérard had believed her guilty and said some very hard things, which she did not resent, because she already loved him. But why did she? Why does any woman love just one man rather than another?

She, Juanita, had been made love to by so many men, then why had her heart gone out to this one rather than to another? And at this moment it seemed as if she read the answer to this riddle in the fire-light. The dancing flames told her that she gave her heart to Gérard de Lanoy because he was one of the few men who knew the whole art of love. There are so few. She had known so many men—so many had made love to her, but it was Gérard who was the perfect lover. Whether he tortured her with his suspicions, or knelt at her feet encircling her with his arms, the love in him for her was just perfection. And she had been so ready to respond to it, if only his life, his precious life, had not been in danger. In order to send him away that night she had been compelled to utter a blasphemy: she had said to him: "I do not love you—please go!" when with her whole soul she was longing for him to stay.

And so he had gone out of her life: the perfect lover who would have made life worth while. Toulon had asserted that he had been shot—but Toulon was a consummate liar, and Juanita had never felt the stab that would have told her that Gérard was dead. Sometimes she longed to speak of him to Fanny de Lanoy, who loved him only a shade less ardently than she did herself: but she felt that the Duchesse hated her, because of Gérard's love for her.

Many a time she had also longed to put a direct question to Lucien Toulon, trusting in her keen intuition to catch something of the truth in his shifty eyes, but somehow Gérard's name had almost become sacred for her, sanctified by the purity of his love, and she felt that to speak it before his most bitter enemy would have been akin to sacrilege.

CHAPTER 34

Gérard, after he had dispatched letter and document to the Director of His Majesty's Secret Cabinet in Paris, remained strangely disturbed in his mind. Not that he felt any regret for what he had done. Though he did not owe a great deal of gratitude to his country, still France was his country, and there was no doubt that she was in grave danger from within as well as from without. It was impossible to live in a place like Geneva without knowing something of the country's precarious position and the blind folly of the Empress and her sycophants, who were hastening on a war which they believed would be spectacular, but could, as a matter of fact, only end in disaster.

The passers-by, the man in the street, spoke openly of the state of things in France, the weakness of her army, her unpreparedness, paucity of armaments, and above all of the lack of fine leadership. The Emperor was ill—very ill, Bazaine's loyalty was questionable, Bourbaki's military skill fell very short of genius. In Geneva local sympathies were all on the side of the French, but the great German element in Switzerland, as well as the innumerable German tourists, seemed strangely well-informed of all the weakness, the suppineness, the vain boastings and above all the treachery which were inevitably leading France to ruin. That there was a serious leakage of treasonable information filtrating through into Germany via Switzerland there could be no doubt. Gérard had now the certainty of it and he would have failed in duty and manliness if he had not sent the proof of it over to Lucien Toulon. It was easy enough to guess what the latter would do in response to Gérard's letter. With the incriminating document in his hands he would contrive somehow or other to make short work of the traitor, and Gérard felt no compunction what-

ever in this respect. But strive how he might against the obsession, he was haunted by thoughts of Anna. Poor, shabby, devoted Anna! with her dog-like adoration for the callous taskmaster, who begrudged her even the occasional solace of a smile.

Gérard could not erase her image from his mind, her watery, pitiful eyes, her red-tipped nose, that poor old bonnet with the shabby lapels, and the large jet brooch, and at times he almost could hear her pitiable cry of love and joy when she met him on the Belgian frontier that day, nearly two years ago: "Hugo! Hugo!" a cry that had gone straight to Gérard's heart and would have pierced the armour of indifference of any decent man. And whenever he thought of Anna, there recurred to his mind the problem of what were the ethics which had regulated his actions in this pursuit and denunciation of a traitor. Had he performed a laudable service to his country such as is demanded of every patriotic citizen? Or had he, on impulse, soiled his hands and stained his honour with the filthy trade of a spy? When he remembered the hard and bitter words which he had spoken to Lorendana on this same subject, he felt how deeply he had wronged her, for now he knew that if ever circumstances demanded it again, if ever he came again on the track of a traitor, he would act in precisely the same manner as he had done in the case of "Biot." The question of money—whether you received payment or not for what you did—was mere sophistry. Killing a fellow-man in time of war is no murder but an act of heroism, even though the soldier receive pay for his deeds. It is the deed that counts in sight of God and conscience, and not the reward it may bring.

But it was a problem for all that!

Because there was always poor, shabby, devoted Anna!

* * * * *

Gérard had the impression that for some unaccountable reason the old newsvendor, after his recent outburst of confidence, purposely avoided entering into conversation with him again. Whenever he stopped at the kiosk to buy his paper, the old man was either busy with customers, or somewhat ostentatiously immersed in account books. Nor did he see "Biot" again for a day or two. He had posted letter and document to Toulon on the Thursday. Both on the Friday and Saturday he went to the lounge of the Hôtel de Russie as usual, but Biot was not at his accustomed place. Discreet and casual questioning of the reception clerk elicited the information that M. Biot was ill and keeping to

his room. But on the Sunday Gérard met him out walking on the Ile Rousseau. He certainly looked thinner and ill. His swarthy skin had taken on a leaden hue, and his goggle eyes stared about him with a furtive, almost a scared glance. Clearly the man had received a rude shock to his nerves, when he realised—as he was bound to do—that his treasonable correspondence had fallen into the hands of the French police. He could not, of course, be arrested on Swiss territory, but every Frenchman knew these days that the arm of the *Cabinet Secret* was a long one, and that at the end of it there was always a hand which had a revolver ready wherewith to reach a traitor.

And it was the terror of assassination that lurked in "Biot's" goggle eyes.

* * * * *

Gérard by now had become heartily sick of Geneva, and since the episodes of the past week the place had become more and more distasteful to him. The thrill of the chase after the traitor had increased his discontent of what was in effect an idle and purposeless life, and he began to feel ashamed of this constant mooning after what must for ever remain unattainable. The old longing for some kind of activity in spheres of science or philanthropy once more stirred within him, and he caught himself sighing for a new world, where youth and energy would be welcomed. It was last week's episode which had wrought the change in him: the excitement of it, the planning and execution had stirred his blood and temporarily eased the nostalgia, which the sight of the distant Juras and the shores of France had failed to appease. He felt all of a sudden now that he must either drag himself forcibly out of his melancholia or for ever remain a wastrel, a bit of driftwood floating down the stream of life, with neither aim nor anchorage —a vagrant unworthy to harbour the memories of a great and perfect love.

And so he made up his mind to go away. London would be his first objective, and then the New World. He wanted to place as great a distance as possible between his unappeased longing and all that France and Paris held that was eternally dear. He made inquiries about the journey, and hoped to get away before the end of the week. Somehow he wanted to be out of the country before the culmination of the tragedy which he had evoked.

In the meanwhile, more from habit than with any set purpose, he still went out on the balcony every morning at the hour when intending passengers hurried over to the boat. He did this prob-

ably out of idle curiosity, wondering whether "Biot" had some preconcerted arrangement with Anna, to give her a word of warning, if anything went wrong; and, sure enough, on the Thursday he saw the man making his way among the crowd in the direction of the landing-stage. Gérard no longer troubled now to wear his former disguise; he ran quickly downstairs and came just in time to the pay-office of the excursion boat to see "Biot" purchase a first-class ticket for the tour of the lake. Gérard did the same.

Nothing happened. "Biot" for the most part sat smoking in the saloon.

At Thonon Gérard took up his stand close to the gangway and saw the passengers come on board, and among them there was Anna, in her shabby bonnet and worn pélerine, market-basket and all; and once more the young man felt that aching pang of pity for her, for she passed quite close to him, when she stepped off the gangway, and he saw the expression of eager expectancy in her pale blue eyes turn to one of disappointment as her glance swept over the second-class deck, and then to the first, where "Biot's" bulky figure now loomed largely. And Gérard could see the expression of mere disappointment turn first to puzzlement and then to acute distress. She tottered, and pressed her poor thin hand in its shabby glove against her heart. He would have given much to go to her assistance, to speak a word of comfort or sympathy to her. He was so terribly, terribly sorry for poor, devoted Anna.

Before she got off the boat at Evian, she gave a final, comprehensive glance all round the first-class deck, but "Biot" had apparently once more taken refuge in the saloon, and Anna stepped off the gangway on to French soil, still wearing that pitiful look of puzzlement and distress. Very obviously "Biot" himself travelling first class was a preconcerted signal between them. The man as usual got off the boat at Lausanne. Gérard did not take the trouble to follow up his tracks. What the man did now had nothing to do with him, and he went back to Geneva, thankful that he had completed all arrangements for leaving Switzerland the next day.

* * * * *

A famous surgeon of Geneva had given Gérard introductions to one or two distinguished medical men in London. Their hospitality and world-wide activities would, in the ordinary way, have made the young Frenchman's stay in the English capital both stimulating and interesting. And at first he had the feeling that he might perhaps in time find peace, if not happiness, in this

atmosphere of hard work and earnest endeavour. But there is no doubt that the love of *la patrie,* which means the love of country for her own sake, is more deeply rooted in the children of France than in those of any other nation. They will suffer in exile more acutely than others, and with them nostalgia, *le mal du pays,* is a really physical ache: "*c'est le mal qui tue,*" they say—the pain that kills.

And Gérard had suffered from it for close on two years as much as and more than most. By family, by tradition and association he belonged to France. From mediæval times the de Lanoys had owned land in Provence: their name is writ large in the Chronicles of Froissart, and one of the earliest patrons of wandering troubadours was a Duc et Prince de Lanoy. And France called to the exiled descendant of that race, as would a mother to her absent child. For nearly two years Gérard had suffered and endured: and the only soothing balm to his ache was the sight of the snow-capped Juras far away, the sight of something that was France.

He had thought that travel and a change of scene would relieve him from this intolerable pain: he came to London determined to exercise all the will-power he possessed to cure this nostalgia which was undermining his health and strength, and it is just possible that he would have succeeded in the end, for Gérard de Lanoy was no weakling and he had arrayed his pride against Fate.

He made a few friends and some extremely pleasant acquaintances, and he enjoyed that whole-hearted hospitality for which the English as a race will always be famous. He realised, in fact, what so few foreigners have ever taken the trouble to find out, that London as an intellectual and artistic centre was among European capitals second to none. As "Paul Gérard," a young amateur scientist, with time to spare and money to spend, he was not only accepted in that centre, but made really welcome.

One of his most delightful experiences during his short stay in London was his association with Count d'Ahrenberg, the confidential secretary of Prince Metternich, Austrian ambassador in Paris. Count d'Ahrenberg was a much older man than Gérard, but, like Gérard himself, he was passionately interested in science, and introduction through a mutual acquaintance led to real friendship between the two men. Gérard was thankful that Count d'Ahrenberg had not yet been appointed to Paris at the time when like all the *jeunesse dorée* he himself had been a frequent guest in the sumptuous palace of the Austrian Embassy: at the same time he could not help thinking that at the first introduction, the Austrian

had given a slight start and thrown a curious, scrutinising glance on him—a glance which Gérard had been at a loss to interpret.

The two of them dined together at the club, they spent a couple of days in the same hospitable country house outside London; in fact, they became, in spite of the difference in their ages, to all intents and purposes, friends. And when at the end of a fortnight the Austrian had to return to his duties, he made a point of urging Gérard to seek him out whenever he found himself back in France.

"I have my quarters in the Hôtel d'Egypte," he said, "in the Place St. Roch—you'll look me up there, won't you?"

Gérard gave the required promise, adding that there was little if any likelihood of his being in Paris for a long time to come.

D'Ahrenberg made no comment on this, but ended by saying:

"And, of course, if at any time I can be of service . . ."

And after his friend went away, Gérard wondered whether in some unaccountable way he had recognised in Paul Gérard the dead Vicomte de Lanoy, and had guessed something of his tragic history.

* * * * *

That delightful association, and others like it, had, during Gérard's first few weeks spent in London, made him hope that here at last he had found a haven where he could free his mind from the obsessions of the past, and could start on that new life of activity of which he had so often dreamed and for which he had longed of late more passionately than ever before.

It was after those first weeks, however, that he first became conscious of a strange feeling, as if some irresistible and mysterious power was dragging him back to Geneva. It was a most extraordinary sensation, not akin to nostalgia this time, because it was not France apparently that was calling to him, but just Geneva. The sensation came to him both by night and by day and pertained to the physical. Invisible chains seemed to be dragging him away from where he was in spite of strenuous resistance on his part, and in the mornings when he awoke after a few hours' restless sleep the sensation was always at its strongest. There seemed to be something irresistibly compelling, which urged him to go away that very day, not to spend another twenty-four hours away from Geneva, for something was happening there which demanded his presence.

And who shall say, in view of the events that followed, that this was not so? Who shall dare to deny the force of a psychic

potency greater than any that is merely physical, a potency which can draw one human being to another as the magnet draws the steel? Gérard wrestled with this power for close on a fortnight. The struggle in the end robbed him of all sleep. He began to see visions—of what, he did not know—hallucinations, in which he saw faces that he did not recognise, and objects the use of which was unknown to him! His state of mind and nerves bordered on the morbid.

That way lay insanity.

As soon as Gérard recognised this he gave up the struggle. He packed up his things, bade adieu to his friends, and was back in Geneva after an absence of little more than a month.

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There is no doubt that men—or women, for a matter of that—who have experienced as much sorrow, as much agony of mind and soul as Gérard had done for close on two years, will thereafter remain more sensitive to external influences and to the atmosphere around them of friendship, indifference, or enmity, of sorrow, anxiety or joy. Especially if they be young.

Certain it is that the moment Gérard was back in his apartment in Geneva he had the feeling that he had done the right thing. A burden seemed to have been lifted off his mind. And this, in spite of the fact that less than a month ago he had fled from the place, suffering from nostalgia, longing to get away, tired of idleness and determined to find a sphere of activity somewhere far away, where it might be easier to forget. This sensation of having obeyed an unseen power, either for good or evil—he didn't yet know which—and of feeling as it were unburdened thereby, was just as odd in its way as that which he had experienced in London, when that same power compelled him to return to Geneva.

But two hours later the mystery was made clear to him. He could only wonder that he had not guessed it before, that, waking or dreaming, he had not seen in the fastastic shadows that peopled his imagination, the one face that with a glance or a smile would have the power to drag him even out of the grave. It was the power that had caused the divine Lover of mankind to say: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." It was the magnetism of Love.

For looking down from his balcony on to the crowded Quai below, Gérard saw Juanita, his wife.

CHAPTER

35

She came out of the Hôtel de Russie and crossed over to the Grand Quai. Her dress of blue cashmere vied with the beauty of the sky. Round her waist she had a satin sash with a large bow at the back; her dress did not touch the ground and under its scalloped flounces her small feet, encased in bottines of Russian kid with tips of patent leather, darted in and out like two little mice.

This was the third week of May and there was already a feeling of summer in the air. The snow had melted on all save the highest peaks, and there was a promise of a spell of really hot weather to come. Juanita unfolded her diminutive parasol of rose-pink silk to shield her face against the sun. She paused on the *trottoir* for a moment or two, looked up and down the Quai, then turned off to her left in the direction of the Pont des Bergues, and presently was lost to view.

The sight of her had been nothing short of a miracle—a miracle so wonderful that Gérard had been completely dazed by it. He stood a minute or two on the balcony, unable to move. The blood had rushed up to his head and his temples were throbbing. Juanita, his wife, was here and—how could he doubt it?—had in some mysterious way drawn him to her side. He made a dash for his hat and ran helter-skelter downstairs. He overtook her, or nearly, on the bridge at the corner of the turning which connects it with the Ile Rousseau. She was less than ten yards ahead of him. Up to now he had been running, pushing his way through the crowd of passers-by, heedless of the black looks that were cast at the unmannerly stranger. He had but one idea in his head and that was to touch her, to speak to her, to let her know that he was there, living and loving, loving her as he had never ceased to do. In that maddening desire he had forgotten everything; who he was, and why he was here; he had forgotten Papa Toulon, and the hand of death which remained stretched over him if the ghost of what he had once been should ever become manifest.

But now suddenly he came to a halt. He had been in a fever-heat while he ran, his spirits in a state of exultation. And all at

once it seemed as if a grim hand more cruel than that of death had thrown an icy shroud over his body. What he had seen some twenty yards ahead of him was that preposterous vulgarian, that egregious traitor "Biot" come tripping down the bridge on the opposite side with a complacent smile on his hideous face; he had entirely cast aside the look of terror which Gérard had noticed in him a few weeks ago. In fact he looked the picture of health and good humour. His silk hat was set jauntily on the side of his head. He wore his coat unbuttoned, showing his frilled shirt and ornate waistcoat and heavy gold chain. But it was not the sight of him—loathsome as it was—that had caused Gérard to come to a standstill, as if he had suddenly been turned to stone; it was the fact that Juanita, too, had paused in her walk, as the odious skip-jack crossed over, obviously in order to greet her. And he did greet her. And she gave him her hand, which he kissed just above the one-button glove, while the smile on his swarthy face broadened into a still more odious grin.

Smothering a cry of rage like that of a tiger in fury, Gérard, after that one moment of paralysing horror, made a forward dash, blind instinct impelling him to knock that abject vermin into the gutter and stamp on his ugly face. Of the inevitable consequences of this act of folly he had not the time to think. His fists were clenched ready to kill; he saw the man he hated through a crimson mist . . . At that same moment a woman's agonised cry rang right through the din of traffic. Men shouted. Women screamed. The crowd swayed and in a few seconds had gathered itself into a tight knot round a one-horse victoria, and its driver, who was cursing loudly on his box, and tugging at the reins. A couple of gendarmes came running along. The crowd made way for them, and closed in again in a tight mass in the middle of the road, whispering and gesticulating, noiseless now in face of the catastrophe. A child had been knocked down by the passing victoria. The mother had uttered the agonised scream—and the crowd, gathering together like a swarm of bees, had interposed a compact wall of humanity between Gérard and the man he would probably have murdered.

Obstinately, doggedly he pushed his way through; but it took time. Once or twice the crowd surging against him jammed him against the parapet of the bridge. He was elbowed and jostled, buffeted and kicked, for a dispute had arisen as to who was at fault, the driver, the child, or the mother. The child was more scared than hurt, but the mother was voluble and the driver's invectives fell on her fast and furious. Everyone wanted to see and

hear and it took a relay of gendarmes to restore order on the bridge and make way for the resumption of traffic.

By the time Gérard had succeeded in forging his way through the crowd, several minutes had gone by. For a time he saw nothing of Juanita or that abominable "Biot," until presently on the Quai des Bergues opposite he caught sight of an open carriage being driven at a sound pace in the direction of the other end of the town, and in the carriage, fluttering in the breeze, the lace-edged disc of a rose-pink parasol.

* * * * *

"The lottery of my destiny bars me the right voluntary choosing"; the greatest poet of all times has put these words into the mouth of one of his most dominating characters, and, of course, in Gérard de Lanoy's case destiny had indeed barred him the right of choosing his course. It seemed as if every incident in his life ever since he had first set eyes on Lorendana in the café-concert at Lyons had been brought about by inexorable Fate for the furtherance of its own ends. At no time had Gérard been so convinced of this, as he was when he got home that morning. But for the dictate of Chance—a child running thoughtlessly across a road—he, Gérard, would at this moment be in the hands of the Swiss police, later, probably, to be handed over to Lucien Toulon and his crowd. He could have laughed aloud at the thought. Was it worth while to have gone through so much mental and nerve torture only to have ended there, where he had once been—on the rack—in a stuffy bureau, facing that fat beast with the thick thighs and the unctuous voice and given no alternative this time from being shot ignominiously in the back like a common felon?

Again it is that greatest of poets who has declared that "there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will!" and Gérard sitting in his apartment that day, trying to readjust his thoughts to the new turn which the events of this morning had given to his whole life, realised more completely than he had ever done before what puppets of chance men really are.

Drawn by the magnetic power of his love to Juanita, he had come back to Geneva, although with heart and soul he had longed to get away from everything that would remind him of the past. He had determined to exert all the strength he possessed towards leading a new life of usefulness and high endeavour. But destiny had brought him back just in time to show him how impossible it would always be for him to forget. Destiny had brought him to Geneva, so that he should see Juanita his wife, see her, that is, as

she still was, the tool of Lucien Toulon, the spy of Napoleon. Never for a moment was he in doubt about that. The woman he loved with every fibre of his soul, whom he had set up in a shrine in his heart, so that he might worship her, Juanita, his divinity, was still plying the trade which he had once arrogantly termed "filthy"—the trade which he himself had instinctively plied when he followed up the tracks of "Biot" the traitor.

The problem which had puzzled him at the time was no less acute now that it was brought home more intimately to him. Juanita had been sent there by Lucien Toulon, as a sequel to his, Gérard's, denunciation of "Biot's" treasonable machinations. "Biot" could not be got at in Switzerland, it was important that he should, by hook or crook, be lured on to French territory. And Juanita had been chosen for the task. The traitor must be brought to justice. He was a perpetual menace to the security of his country, a danger perhaps to her very existence. And Juanita was fulfilling the task allotted to her by those who were set to guard the safety of France. Was that wrong? Was it despicable? Was it, in a word, filthy? And Gérard brought face to face with the problem in all its crudity, could only wonder what the right answer to it could be.

If only he could have got Anna out of his mind! But whenever he was confronted with the problem of what were the rights and wrongs of Juanita's actions or his own, with reference to "Biot," there rose before his mind the picture of Anna, and her dog-like devotion to the egregious brute.

CHAPTER 36

In the days that were to come, whenever Gérard heard men and women, intellectual or mere vapid talkers, speak with arrogance of man's power to shape his own life, he would think of that day in Geneva, when the breath of spring had melted the snow in the valleys, and the waters of the lake were like a translucid mirror reflecting the glory of the sky. There was nothing in the balmy air, the peace of the water, the rose-tinted mountain-tops far away to suggest that an inexorable destiny had chosen this day of all

days to cut certain threads of life which she had been idly spinning for days, and months and years.

Twenty-four hours had gone by and Gérard had not seen Juanita again. "Biot" he did see once or twice, looking jaunty and complacent. Evidently the man's fears had been allayed—probably, so thought Gérard, by what Juanita had said or suggested to him. Gérard loathed him worse than ever. He began to wonder in his mind whether he would not be serving his country best by indulging his desire to murder the blackguard.

"Let them over there have their way with the brute."

Gérard started. The words came in answer to his thoughts. He realised that he was standing in front of the newspaper kiosk, and that a few seconds ago he had been engaged in buying *Le Gaulois*. Then "Biot" had gone past, with a broad smile on his face, his silk hat tilted at a jaunty angle, his fat fingers holding a big cigar; the next moment he looked up in the direction of the Hôtel de Russie. Gérard looked up also and saw Juanita stepping out on the balcony. She was dressed for going out: in a dress of soft pink taffeta with touches of black about the flounces, and in the sash. She wore black shoes and a small hat of black straw that had a scarf of blond lace falling from it and brought back to the front and there fastened under a large crimson rose. Under the hat her chestnut hair frizzled and curled caught glints of gold from the morning sun. Never had she seemed more beautiful to Gérard. Even at that distance he could see that she smiled. Smiled down at that odious "Biot," who took off his hat and made an exaggerated obsequious bow. Then it was that thoughts of murder took definite shape in Gérard's mind, until the strangely apposite words fell on his ear.

"Let them over there have their way with the brute."

It was the newsvendor who had spoken. Gérard turned and looked at him. It was the first time since that memorable afternoon that his quaint old friend had taken any notice of him, the first time he had appeared ready for conversation.

"She is a clever lady," the old man went on with a chuckle; "she'll have him."

He shrugged and nodded and chuckled again, and finally muttered to himself:

"He is ready baited now. Just like a cat that has smelt cheese. . . . Give her another day. . . . She'll have the muckworm right enough."

How horrible it all was! Gérard's pride of name and ancestry, his sense of honour rebelled at the thought of his wife's association

with this man-hunt, and of his own share in this chase after a miserable human rat; hardly worth kicking save for the fact that he was a menace to France. He couldn't bear to hear the old newsvendor's chuckle or to see the glint of satisfaction in those pale watery eyes. He thrust *Le Gaulois* quickly into his pocket, and turned away hardly knowing in which direction he went. Presently he found himself at the corner of the Pont du Mont-Blanc, close to the pay-box of the excursion steamer. A small knot of passengers had queued up outside it, waiting to get their tickets as soon as the *guichet* was open. The steamer was alongside the pier. She was not the express-boat that did the tour of the lake; a placard on board her announced that she was only going as far as Evian. Gérard turned away to avoid the crowd.

The ticket-window was now open. Passengers hurried to the boat; there were not many. And suddenly Gérard saw Juanita come across the road towards the Grand Quai. She was laughing and chatting with "Biot." Together they made their way to the pay-box, took their tickets and went on board the steamer.

Gérard, who hardly knew what he was doing, followed her. As in a dream he made his way to the upper deck and there, hands in pockets, he walked desultorily up and down. And presently Juanita came on deck with "Biot." The man found her a comfortable chair and they sat down. Juanita had her diminutive parasol which she now opened and held up between her face and the sun. Gérard could no longer see her face, but he did see her beautiful hand, for she had taken off her glove, and her small feet below her rose-pink gown.

Of all the hours of mental agony that he had gone through in his young life, not one perhaps had been so hard to bear as this. Every fibre of his being, every sinew in his body ached with the desire to kill. Education, self-control, civilisation counted for nothing. Gérard at the moment was nothing but primitive man, who longed to have another by the throat, but was kept back by forces greater than his own will. And with this primitive desire to kill there was the yearning after the one and only woman in the world—the passionate yearning to seize and hold her, to carry her away to some desert lair, where none could find her, where she could belong to no one but him.

"I serve my country as best I can." Had she never spoken those words, the whole of her future and his would have been different. They rang in his ears now. But for them primitive man would have gained the day over the perfect lover, whose thoughts are for the beloved rather than for his own desires. It was those words

that kept Gérard back from the superlatively rash impulse to which he nearly yielded. "What harm," he thought, "should I be doing *her*?" How would *she* suffer if by a scandal or premature exposure he threw himself athwart her plans? And visions of that fat beast Toulon torturing her with his sarcasm and his threatening her—God help him!—with death or disgrace, paralysed the lover's will and stayed his murderous hand.

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At Thonon instinct drew his gaze to the landing stage, where passengers were waiting to come on board. Among them was Anna.

Gérard knew at once that he had expected to see her. All along he had expected it. Ugly, shabby, devoted Anna! Gérard, seeing her, thought of the last few weeks, when probably day after day she had watched the steamer come in from Geneva and looked on the decks for that odious, swarthy face, that fat arrogant figure which to her poor, weak eyes, was the most beautiful in all the world. How cruel had the little god of love been when he shot his dart at such random that it pierced the heart of this almost sexless woman and delivered it into this man's callous, impure hands!

For weeks probably Anna had been on the watch. Gérard pictured her in his mind watching—watching as beautiful Hero watched for her Leander—alternating between hope and fear. Now she saw him. Her eagerness was pitiable, until she caught sight of Juanita, and then the expression on her poor face became terrifying. An expression of unearthly fear. She came on board, and at once made for the upper deck. Somehow Gérard could not keep his eyes off her. She was the most pitiful thing he had ever seen in all his life. Juanita probably didn't see her, for at the very moment that Anna turned towards the upper deck "Biot" rose and apparently asked Juanita to come into the saloon, for she gave a little nod, rose from her chair, closed her parasol and walked away with him across the deck.

Anna found a vacant seat on one of the wooden benches in the bow, and here she remained sitting with her market basket on her knee, her thin hands folded over its handle. Her eyes remained fixed on the one spot where "Biot's" bulky figure had turned into the saloon. She never moved. To Gérard she appeared like a statue of tragedy hewn out of granite.

As the steamer neared the pier at Evian, one of the officials started clearing the decks of passengers, shouting: "Evian-les-Bains! Tout le monde descend!" Juanita came out of the saloon

closely followed by "Biot." At sight of him Anna suddenly rose as if moved by a spring. She grasped her basket convulsively with both hands, and made a movement as if she would run to him. Blind instinct caused Gérard to put a restraining hand on her arm. She shook him off. At that moment "Biot" passed quite close to her, and as he did so he threw her a glance which had the effect of paralysing her. His thick lips parted in a vicious snarl, showing a double row of large white teeth, like those of a savage feline. Almost Gérard thought that he could hear him muttering, as he had done that day at Feignies: "Don't be a fool, Anna!" And she, passive and obedient, at once subsided. She remained quite still once more like a stone-hewn image of tragedy.

Only her eyes appeared alive now, and in them her whole soul seemed to be reflected. Her long-suffering, patient soul. She and Gérard were among the few passengers left on deck for the moment. The steamer would be returning back to Geneva in a few minutes; already passengers for the return journey were crowding round the pay-box, and there were a few who were doing the double trip to Evian and back again for the sake of the outing. A man in uniform came round examining tickets. Gérard paid him for two to Geneva, intimating that Anna was with him. She took no notice of anything around her. Her eyes followed the man she so blindly worshipped as he stepped off the gangway on to the landing stage, where he overtook Juanita. At the exit barrier a couple of French officials were examining passports, but at sight of Juanita and her companion they stood aside and allowed them both to pass through unchallenged.

Still Anna did not move; she just craned her neck the better to watch "Biot" as he strode along by the side of Juanita, in the direction of the new hotel. On the quayside, less than sixty metres from the landing stage, there was a whitewashed one-storied building over the roof of which a large tricolour flag swayed gently backwards and forwards in the breeze. The building bore the legend, "Empire Français" and below that the words, "Commissariat de Police." A couple of stone steps led up to the front door, which was wide open. Two men in uniform were standing at the foot of the steps. As soon as Juanita and "Biot" came abreast of the door, the two men stepped forward and each put a hand on "Biot's" shoulder. He gave a thunderous shout and struggled frantically, but in less than a minute he had been dragged fighting and kicking into the Commissariat, while from every direction idlers and passers-by came running up or down the Quai to see what was happening.

Gérard had only just time to note that Juanita had passed on; she succeeded in getting clear of the crowd that had congregated round the door of the Commissariat, and continued her way leisurely in the direction of the hotel. Gérard did no more than note this, for the next moment a horrifying groan, almost like a death-rattle, broke from Anna's throat. She made a dash for the gangway, but this time Gérard was able to hold her back. She struggled violently, and dropped her basket in the tussle. After that she fought like a madwoman, hitting Gérard in the face with her fists and at one time digging her teeth into his hand till they drew blood. He hung on to her as best he could, trying to save the poor thing from herself, for out of her market-basket papers came tumbling out on to the deck and it was not difficult to guess what were the contents of those papers and what secrets they would reveal. Had the doings at the Commissariat not engaged everyone's attention, the struggle would not have lasted longer than a minute, for someone would surely have interfered. But as it was Gérard's tussle with the poor madwoman—she was that by now—went on in a deserted part of the deck, and several minutes went by before some men from the ship came hurrying along. The sound of their running footsteps and their shouts seemed to have a galvanising effect on Anna, for in a mighty effort, which was almost superhuman, she succeeded in slipping out of Gérard's grasp, and before he could seize her again, she was across the deck and over the rail, and without uttering a sound had thrown herself into the water.

Gérard was after her in a moment. It was sheer, blind instinct that caused him to do that; for if he had paused to reflect, if only for a second, he would have realised that death was the only solution for poor Anna's thorny problem. But at moments like these a man does not reflect, he just acts as instinct guides him, and instinct in a young, athletic man is to save life if he can. And now there began in the placid waters of the lake a titanic struggle between a man in the prime of life and a middle-aged woman determined to seek death. Despair had given Anna a giant's strength. Twice she succeeded in twining her arms round Gérard's neck and nearly pulling him under with her; strong swimmer though he was, it was as much as he could do to keep his head above water, and he certainly would have perished with her, had she not suddenly lost consciousness. It was probably the poor tired heart that had given out at the very moment that a few idlers on the quay, perceiving the struggle, started to shout and a couple of men were hastily putting out in a boat to go to the rescue. Gérard

gathered the lifeless woman in the hollow of one arm and paddled with his burden to the boat, into which he was hauled by two pairs of eager hands.

The crowd on the quay and about the landing stage had only just realised that something was happening on this side which might prove more exciting than the summary arrest at the Commissariat of Police. The fat man in the elegantly tailored clothes had been whisked away into the Commissariat with extraordinary speed, and there was nothing more to stare at there, except at an open door, and a couple of gendarmes in uniform who were guarding it.

But here there was plenty to see. A young man it seems had plunged into the lake in order to rescue a poor woman who had attempted to commit suicide: but for the timely arrival of the boat he would certainly have lost his own life. No one had actually seen everything that happened, but when Gérard was helped out of the boat, he was acclaimed by discreet murmurs of praise. He still had his inanimate burden in his arms. A number of hands were stretched out, eager to haul him ashore, and to help steady him on his feet. A couple of men in uniform came along and made to take Anna's lifeless body from him. Gérard clung to it for a moment or two, as if reluctant to give her up. Instinctively he knew that she was dead, even before a man who stood close by whispered it in his ear. She weighed less than a child. Gérard held her close to his breast: had he been alone he would have pressed his lips on her smooth forehead. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted. There was a strange beauty about the face now, the beauty of perfect peace. Poor, tired Anna! She was at rest.

Gérard gave the body over into the arms of the uniformed official.

"Who is she?" this man asked him.

Gérard said, "I haven't the least idea." And he added: "She was on the deck beside me. She threw herself into the water. I jumped in after her. . . ."

"It is heroic, Monsieur," someone said, and there were more murmurs of praise among the crowd.

"The cross-currents . . ." one man added and most people nodded significantly.

"And the water is so cold," a market woman put in with the cheerful pessimism of her class: "Monsieur has probably caught his death. . . ."

Yes! the cold! Gérard had not thought of it before. He hadn't

felt it. Not until the woman spoke of it. But now he realised how cold he was. It was still warm and sunny but he was standing in the shade and he felt terribly cold. His teeth were chattering. A kindly fist gripped him under one arm and he felt himself being led away.

"C'est bien ça M. Lenoir!" was said approvingly by someone.

"My wife will look after him."

"A cup of strong black coffee, that's what he wants."

Gérard heard all this, but only in a confused murmur.

Someone thrust a hat into his hand.

"Your hat, Monsieur! It was picked up on the deck of the steamer."

Mechanically Gérard put it on his head. He allowed himself to be led away. He felt colder and colder and he could not keep his teeth from chattering. Vaguely in the distance he heard the paddle of the steamer as she moved away from the pier.

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M. Lenoir it seems was the local chemist. He was extremely kind. In fact his kindness was almost overwhelming and was only exceeded by that of his wife. He took Gérard into his back shop and helped him to strip off his wet clothes. The room was warm and sunny. It smelt of peppermint and calendula and bitter almonds and what not. M. Lenoir put something soft and dry round Gérard's shoulders and gently pushed him into a capacious arm-chair. After a few moments Mme. Lenoir came in with a steaming cup of coffee. She was fat and pleasant and loquacious. She thrust the cup into Gérard's hands and put a pillow to his head.

"You drink this, Monsieur," she said, "while we dry your clothes. Then try and get a little sleep. Lenoir has put a drop of something good into the coffee and that will quieten your nerves. Never mind about spilling the coffee. It is just nerves that makes your hand shake. Drink it down. Never mind about burning your tongue."

She said a lot more while Gérard drank the black coffee into which kind Lenoir had put a drop of something good which was obviously brandy and very comforting. Gérard began to feel drowsy. It was the reaction after nerve-strain. He was feeling deliciously warm now. Warm and dry. Madame Lenoir talked a lot: then she took the cup from him and waddled out of the room.

The last thing of which Gérard was conscious was of a cuckoo-clock somewhere above his head striking four.

CHAPTER

37

THE cuckoo's call rang out seven times and Gérard woke. He had been asleep three hours and felt comfortable and warm. It was dark in the room, for Madame Lenoir had drawn the volets, only through its chinks did the golden glow of the afternoon sun come shyly peeping in. Gérard jumped to his feet, threw open the volets and for a few moments remained leaning on the window sill inhaling the sweet, delicious mountain air, with its odour of wild thyme, and pine wood, its cool tang that whipped up the blood and gave savour to life.

France! He was in France! He had not realized it when first he set foot on her soil, with the dead German woman in his arms. But now he knew it, the very scent of the earth proclaimed it, as did the song of thrush and blackbird and the flutter of their wings. He was in France. Passport and other frontier formalities had not come into question. Gérard had been the hero of the moment. When he landed on the pier and gave the woman's dead body into the arms of the officials, they made no inquiries about his passport; obviously they were far too busy with the arrest of one spy and the suicide of another to bother about him. Anyway they asked no questions, and Gérard by the merest chance had suddenly got what he had yearned for, for two years, the joy of setting his foot once more on French soil.

His clothes dried and carefully pressed were lying in a pile on a chair. On the top of the pile lay his hat and his pocket-book. Without any definite plan in his mind, but with a kind of feverish exultation he opened the pocket-book to see what money there was inside. There was a good deal, quite as much and more than he would want for that vague project which had not yet taken definite shape in his mind. When he left for London a month and a half ago he had taken with him in addition to a banker's draft a good deal of Swiss money in bank-notes, and, as he didn't stay in London very long he brought most of his money back as well as a good wad of English notes. Since his arrival in Geneva, so many events had crowded in upon him that he had not thought of putting all that money away. It had remained inside his pocket-

book. And the notes, despite the soaking they had received, were intact.

Gérard hastened to dress and went in search of his kind host and hostess. He found them in their front shop with a couple of gossips, all of them very excited and talking volubly: there was any amount of "Mais pensez donc!" and "une espionne!" Gérard paused a moment in the doorway in order to listen. Yes! the police had evidently established poor Anna's identity. The market basket had been found on deck with all its compromising papers.

"*C'est inouï!*" the worthy *bourgeois* of Evian declared. A woman to do such a thing! And all those abominable Germans with their spies! A man had been arrested, just in time! He was selling France to the Prussians! and the woman, it seems, was his accomplice! Good thing for her she had killed herself! Terrible! Unheard of! To think that there was such wickedness in the world! And so on! and so on! Gérard listened for a time and thought of poor Anna! and of how little wickedness there was in her simple, self-sacrificing soul. How thankful he was that she was out of all this and at peace. Presently the gossips went off, taking their parcels of pills or ointments with them, and the amiable chemist came running round his counter, greeting Gérard with that effusive amiability peculiar to this type of Frenchman. Both he and Mme. Lenoir asked interminable questions: how had Monsieur slept? and did he feel warm? had he coughed in his sleep? or shivered? or sneezed? Gérard assured the worthy pair that he had done none of these things, that he was well and warm and filled with gratitude for all their kindness. He was longing to get away, to be alone and allowed to think things out. But Monsieur and Madame were far too excited to let their guest go so soon. They had such a lot to tell him. Was he not the hero of the marvellous adventure of this day? Such an opportunity for going on talking, talking and talking did not often present itself.

M. Lenoir buttonholed Gérard.

"Have you heard, Monsieur," he asked, "that the miserable woman you pulled out of the water was a German spy?"

"Yes," Gérard replied, "I heard you talking just now."

Mme. Lenoir drew a deep sigh and folded her hands over her ample bosom.

"Just think, Monsieur!" she said, "a spy!"

"Good thing she's dead, I say!" commented M. Lenoir.

The woman sighed again and furtively made the sign of the cross.

"But how awful," she murmured, "to stand before God with

such a terrible sin on your conscience! She couldn't have had time to repent."

Gérard made no comment on this. It would have been no use. But in his heart he felt convinced that Anna's humble, devoted soul would find grace before her Maker's throne. He would have liked to have got away from the subject with these worthy, loquacious people; but it was impossible. M. Lenoir had now got hold of a button of his coat and clung to it, and when Mme. Lenoir ceased talking, which was not often, then he began. They did not spare Gérard a single detail of the happenings of this afternoon. The man who was arrested previously had been brought back to the Commissariat and confronted with the woman's dead body. At first he had denied all knowledge of her. But the police of Evian were too clever for him. M. le Commissaire was quite wonderful; he forced the man to speak the truth, and by dint of cross-questionings he was finally made to confess that the woman was his wife and his accomplice.

"And they have taken him to Thonon," M. Lenoir managed to put in here, and almost wrenched the button off Gérard's coat, "and he will be shot at dawn."

And fat Mme. Lenoir sighed and murmured complacently:

"I have half a mind to go and see that ignoble spy shot. Just think, Monsieur, that wretch was selling all the secrets of our army to the Prussians, and it was his miserable wife who brought him the information which he passed on to Bismarck."

Heaven knows how long Gérard would have been forced to endure all this, but for the fact that suddenly the shrill whistle of an oncoming steamer broke in on the good people's loquacity. It sent their thoughts flying in another direction. Did Monsieur desire to get back to Geneva to-night? There was a later boat, and if Monsieur would honour them by taking supper with them first, there would still be plenty of time to catch the last steamer. As an alternative, would Monsieur further honour them by staying the night under their humble roof. This time the worthy chemist got hold of the lapel of Gérard's coat and held tightly on to it while he explained to his guest the wonderful advantage of sleeping in a bed fashioned to the last pillow by Mme. Lenoir's able hands.

"A night's rest will do Monsieur all the good in the world," he declared. And as for the feather bed!—well! Monsieur Lenoir could state it as a positive fact that there was not another feather bed like it in the whole of France.

Gérard, embarrassed and slightly irritated by this overwhelming

kindness and profuse offers of hospitality, found it very difficult to refuse everything without appearing ungracious. He finally accepted to stay to supper, but explained that as a matter of fact he had come purposely to Evian to-day in order to meet a friend who either had already arrived or would arrive early in the morning at the new hotel, and that he had already arranged to spend the night there himself. This did in a measure satisfy the kind people, and Mme. Lenoir waddled off to her kitchen, while Monsieur busied himself with putting up the shutters of his shop.

* * * * *

As a matter of fact, though Gérard at the moment was pining for solitude and the chance of thinking over the possibilities of the immediate future, he did not wish, for obvious reasons, to sally forth into the open till after dark. He did his best to curb his impatience, and being hungry he did honour to Mme. Lenoir's excellent supper.

At half-past nine he finally took his leave, making ample promises to come over again soon and pay his dear friends another visit. He had much difficulty in dissuading M. Lenoir from accompanying him to the hotel. He knew his way quite well, he declared, and would probably meet his friend in the gardens. Anyway, he did ultimately find himself out in the open and alone. It was not yet quite dark; the twilight, a beautiful soft purple twilight, lingered over the lake. A few stars glimmered palely in the turquoise sky. Gérard walked briskly along the shore. It felt good to tread the soil of France.

He didn't go to the new hotel, even though he was conscious of an overweening desire to ascertain if Juanita was there. She may have been: Gérard had seen her walking in that direction after the arrest of Biot. But with all the projects that were seething in his head, vague though they were, it was safety that he was playing for at the moment. And now he could afford to wait.

He found quarters for the night in an obscure little hotel in the village.

And the next morning he hired a carriage to drive him to Armenasse railway station, where the slow trains stop on the main line between Thonon and Paris.

CHAPTER

38

More than a month had gone by since M. Lucien Toulon, chief of the Imperial *Cabinet Secret*, had last paid his respects to Mme. la Vicomtesse de Lanoy. She had sent him a note by one of her servants the evening before, telling him that she was back in Paris and would be pleased to see him.

Punctual to the minute, punctilious as to every form of ceremony, M. Toulon arrived at Madame's sumptuous apartment soon after eleven o'clock. Madame's boudoir with its dainty rose-pink curtains and Aubusson carpet looked wonderfully cosy and cheerful, with its tall windows thrown open on the leafy trees of the Boulevard, and the morning sun shedding its warmth and its gaiety on gilded consols, Tanagra statuettes and rare bibelots and ornaments, all of which were but the fitting frame to the exquisite picture their owner presented.

And how Papa Toulon enjoyed the contemplation of that picture! Not only because of its beauty, but because of its amazing value. She had come back from Switzerland, this erstwhile obscure cabaret dancer, her difficult mission accomplished, without fuss, without scandal, above all without that publicity which is the bane of secret service intrigues. "Biot" alias "Folay" alias God knows what, had been shot without trial at Thonon, twelve hours after his arrest, and his accomplice—a woman, by Jove!—had committed suicide.

Had he, Toulon, not every reason to be proud of her—his pupil, his tool, his handmaid? He had picked her out of her mean surroundings, trained her, taught her all she knew. Now she was past-mistress in her art, a beautiful slave, with just enough independence of spirit and a sufficient measure of feminine caprice to give zest to the intimate relations that must obtain between a lord-paramount and his servant. He was an epicure, was Papa Toulon, in his handling of beautiful women. He liked them to be recalcitrant, wayward, inclined to defy him, so that he might have the pleasure of letting them have a glimpse—just a peep—at the flail which he was ready to wield for their subduing.

And not one of his little army of bondslaves gave him so much

pleasure in that way as Juanita Lorendana, Vicomtesse de Lanoy, the great lady, the darling of society, the favourite of the Empress —his creation and his slave. He had had more than one passage of arms with her; on more than one occasion she had tried to defy him, and he had just played with her like a sleepy, fat tiger would play with his prey. He had given her rope so that her rebellious spirit might for the moment think itself free to soar into regions where it could hope to lord it over him, to chaff or even disobey him. Wordy warfare would follow, during which he would remain perfectly suave, gentle and indulgent, while with glowing eyes and cheeks aflame she would assert her right to follow her own counsel. Then suddenly he would give a jerk to the rope, shorten it, make her aware of the iron hand that held her bound, and if that didn't suffice he would let her have a peep at the flail with which he was ready to strike if she actually disobeyed. A moral flail, but a powerful one. She had never really felt it yet. Papa Toulon kept it in reserve, for more and more frequently of late had she shown signs of rebellion. But oh! for the joy of wielding it in earnest one day!

Hitherto she had always given in and he, Toulon, had then experienced the satisfaction of subduing that mutinous spirit, of seeing the flash of defiance die out from those wonderful, mysterious eyes; he had savoured the perfect joy of breaking a will that was only a fraction less powerful than his own.

But as soon as he arrived this morning and kissed the beautiful hand that was held out to him, he guessed that a storm was brewing. Juanita at once appeared detached, cool, self-contained. Disdainful even. She was exquisitely dressed and received him as if she were the master and he a menial summoned to her apartment to receive his orders. This threw him into an ecstasy of delight. If he had been less conscious of his own unromantic personality he would have compared himself to an old war-horse, sniffing the powder and scenting battle. He found his first delight in hearing her say impatiently: "We'll say no more about that," which she did in response to his effusive compliments on the "Biot" affair.

"What I've done," she went on coolly, "I've done. The man was a traitor and I did my duty to my country by bringing him to justice. I had nothing to do with the woman, but I was not surprised when she committed suicide. And now," she concluded lightly, "let us talk of something else."

Wasn't she wonderful? Defiant, disdainful, lording it over her chief. There was no doubt in Papa Toulon's mind that he was in

for a very exhilarating hour, crossing swords with this exquisite adversary.

He gave an affected little sigh, allowed the monocle to fall from his eye, then readjusted it again; he tried to cross his short fat legs one over the other but found it, as usual, quite impossible. Finally he said, looking the very picture of benevolence and sorrowful sympathy:

"Alas, belle Madame! there is only one thing I can talk to you about."

She feigned astonishment.

"Oh?" she queried; "what may that be?"

"Work."

"Not again?"

"Why, of course. What else? Thanks to you we have shot Biot, but we haven't got the traitor who supplied the woman with information about the gun . . . And that is a thing we've got to find out . . ."

Then as Juanita offered no comment on this, he went on quietly, without raising his voice beyond just a soft, pleasant pitch which could not possibly jar on the most sensitive ear.

"Your next task, ma chère," he said, "will be to find for me the blackguard who has access to our War Office secrets and sells them to the enemies of France. It shouldn't be difficult. Child's play for you. As I said before, the field is narrow. A week . . . say a fortnight should be sufficient."

Still Juanita didn't speak. She rose and went over to the window, and there she stood for a while looking down on the busy life that went on in the street below. Men, young and old, hurrying to work or play, midinettes in their thin, summer frocks clicking their heels against the pavement, laughing, talking, joking, ogling the men as they passed by; omnibuses rattling down the cobble-stones, *cochers* in their shiny black hats and big-caped coats whipping up their nags; in the open carriages women in extravagant toilets holding up their diminutive parasols against the sun; over the way a café, its awning down, round tables, iron chairs, waiters in long white aprons carrying trays with glasses and bottles! Life! Life! gay or sad, anxious or care-free, but life for all that . . . life that is free! The right to laugh or weep, to sit silent or to chatter; to be free to nurse sorrow or joy, to come and to go, to work or to idle at will, and not at the bidding of a callous taskmaster.

Juanita drew a long and deep sigh. She was so tired of it all! The time had come when she felt she could no longer carry on.

She longed to be out of it, away from all these schemes and intrigues, from orders to obey and tasks to fulfil: she longed for freedom to lead her own life, to think her own thoughts, to brood over her own sorrows and dwell in peace on the sweet memories of what could never be again. When she came back from Geneva, she made up her mind to end it all. At all cost, at any cost she would end it. Lucien Toulon might try to terrorise her with threats of death. Well! she didn't care. Life was so little worth living that she would just as soon face its end. She thought of the unfortunate woman who had thrown herself in the water rather than face exposure and the death of the man she cared for, and Juanita envied her the peace which she had sought and found.

Standing by the window she braced herself for the conflict; for conflict it would be. She knew that. Toulon would use cajolery at first, and then threats. But she felt impervious to threats, because she knew that she didn't care. Through the continuous rumble of traffic she heard Toulon's mutterings: he was saying something, the meaning of which did not reach to her brain. She felt tears of self-pity rise to her eyes, and brushed them impatiently away. She was not going to show weakness. Not now, when she was about to embark on a life and death struggle for rest and peace.

In the meanwhile Papa Toulon was content to bide his time. If he heard the sigh and guessed at the tears he did not betray his knowledge. With eyes half closed under his fleshy lids he waited, whilst his podgy hand fondled the coarse hair on his chin. When he felt that the time had come for him to speak, he said in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone of voice:

"There is something else, *ma chère amie,* for which I require your immediate services. It is really of far greater importance than the mere bringing of spies and traitors to book."

This time his voice did penetrate to Juanita's consciousness. She pulled herself together, knowing that the conflict had begun. She felt braced now for the fight. Never had she felt so strong and so determined to win. Whatever it was that Toulon wished her to do, she would not do it. She had given three of the best years of her life to the service of her country. Now she had earned her rest and she would get it at any cost. She turned away from the window, but remained standing behind her chief so that he should not see the faintest vestige of tell-tale tears.

Toulon, satisfied that he had her full attention, continued:

"We are heading straight for war, as you know. Leopold of Hohenzollern will, I believe, withdraw his candidature to the throne of Spain. But this will not satisfy the Empress. The can-

didature of a Prussian prince was a splendid pretext for war and the concession will be something of a disappointment. She knows that the dynasty is doomed unless spectacular victories will rouse the people to fresh enthusiasm for the name of Bonaparte. She will fish about for another pretext to declare war and she will find one sooner or later. The Emperor is ill—very ill. The disease has made alarming progress of late. The surgeons advise an operation, but he won't face it. He is all for peace, but in the end he will prove too weak to oppose the Empress. All these things are facts which are absolutely indisputable. And it is equally indisputable that we—the country—are heading straight for a disaster, the like of which has never been known in our history."

Lucien Toulon paused a moment in order to recover his breath. He listened for the sound of Juanita's silk dress when she crossed the floor. He heard her move away from the window and come slowly back across the room. After a time she sank down in the chair opposite him. He noted with cruel satisfaction how pale and weary she looked. There were no tears in her eyes, but they were circled with dark rims which betrayed mental fatigue. Leaning her head on the back of the chair she waited for him to proceed. In the elegant boudoir which seemed more fitted for frivolous dallying than for momentous warnings, there fell a silence which in itself was full of portent. An opportune silence through which the measured ticking of the beautiful Boulle clock sounded like the monotonous rumble of Destiny's spinning-wheel. Juanita hardly noticed this silence. In her ears Toulon's last words were still ringing when he resumed with a certain impressive solemnity.

"The army is badly organised. It is badly officered, badly equipped, badly found. It is absolutely unfit to stand up to the finest military organisation known since the days of the great Bonaparte. It will suffer defeat after defeat. France will be humiliated, her territory truncated, the Emperor a prisoner or an exile. . . . We know all that. . . . All of us, that is, who have looked behind the scenes while a sick ruler who can hardly sit his horse reviews a few picked-out troops on the parade ground. . . . You would think the Empress would know, for she is no fool. . . . She is only blind. . . . She wants to save the throne for her son . . . she doesn't care at what cost. . . . At the present moment she is angling for the friendship of Austria and Italy . . . for their help in case of war with Prussia . . . if she can get it. But Metternich is wary and Nigra holds aloof. Neither of them will move till he knows what the other side proposes to do. But we *must* know what Austria and Italy are going to do. . . . We've *got* to know if

they will help us against Bismarck . . . with Austria to help us we might even get Bavaria and the Southern German States. Their hatred of Prussia is pretty much alive still. Then there's Italy. . . . What attitude is Victor Emmanuel likely to take up? Clericalism and the Vatican are mixed up in Italian policy, we know. Italy will make demands, and we must know what these are likely to be . . . the withdrawal of our troops from Rome probably . . . but we don't know . . ."

Again Lucien Toulon paused. He banged his clenched fist against the arm of his chair.

"We've *got* to know—we've got to know!" he reiterated, and emphasised his words with repeated bangs with his fist. "A great deal of correspondence is passing just now between the chancelleries here and the courts of Vienna and Rome. . . . Diplomatic immunity secures their post-bags against interference from us. We have tried every form of bribery and corruption with their messengers but without success. It is your turn now."

These last five words rang out across the room like a mighty challenge. Toulon, leaning forward in his chair, his hot eyes glaring across at the woman before him, looked like some large irate feline ready to spring. His fat hands were like huge paws ready to deal a stunning blow to anything that stood in his way. And the woman looked so delicate and so frail, her face was almost bloodless, and her eyes half closed. She murmured inquiringly, meaninglessly:

"Mine?"

"Yours, of course!" Toulon retorted. "Why do you think I'm here——? Why have I unburdened my very soul before you? It is your turn to do something big, stupendous, for France. What you have done up to now has been child's play in comparison with what you can do now."

"If you only knew, my friend," Juanita said, with a desperate sigh of weariness, "how terribly tired I am of it all."

Toulon gave a grunt. It was very like a snarl.

"This is not the time," he said bluntly, "to talk of being tired."

"I want a rest, my good Lucien," she went on in a dull, toneless voice; "I want to get away into the country: to forget that there are such things as diplomacy and intrigues, and treacherous secrets. I have worked very hard for you for three years. I must have a rest."

"We'll all have plenty of rest presently," Toulon retorted with a sneer. "There'll be neither diplomacy nor intrigues when the Prussians are at our gates."

"And I don't feel that I have the power any longer to do all that you expect ot me. I might blunder through sheer fatigue."

"What?" Toulon exclaimed, and his voice sounded now like the growl of an animal in fury. "Not the power to get behind the correspondence that goes on between Metternich and Nigra and their respective courts? Blunder? . . . You? . . ." Then he went on more quietly:

"The correspondence with Austria all goes through the hands of this new man they've got over here: Count d'Ahrenberg—a charming man, by the way—no longer very young, but certainly charming. He goes backwards and forwards with instructions and reports between Paris and Vienna. They also make considerable use of our telegraphic service: but they have a new code, the key of which we must have if we are to get an inkling of what the Emperor Francis Joseph's intentions really are. Why, to anyone like you, all that is child's play. . . . Not the power? . . . You? . . . You are not serious, my dear?"

"I never was so serious in my life," Juanita murmured, and looked her taskmaster straight in the eyes.

Toulon made no immediate comment on this. He slid forward in his chair so as to get nearer to her. He intertwined his thick fingers, and twirled his huge ruby ring round and round, until it caught a glint from the sun and threw out blood-red sparks. He sniffed and coughed and fixed the monocle more firmly in his eye. This was a very different proposition to the one with which the beautiful Juanita was wont to confront him, when she had what he was pleased to call her megrims. There had been a spirit of rebellion in her at times, a mutinous mood which a glance from his eyes, a veiled threat had always been able to subdue. He was far too shrewd a connoisseur of human nature not to realise that spirit and mood only lay dormant, that they were there all the time, ready to break bounds at any moment. But never before now had mutiny involved a menace. And in Juanita's words, in her whole attitude this morning there was a veiled menace.

Menace of what?

"I haven't the power . . . I might blunder . . ." she had said. What exactly did she mean by that? Did she mean to play him false? Him? Her teacher, her master, her creator? Surely she would not dare do that. But with women—beautiful women—one never knew. Treacherous? Of course they were treacherous, all of them, if it served their purpose or their emotions to turn on the hand that fed them. At any rate that was Papa Toulon's opinion

of the sex, and he had studied it—closely—for close on half a century.

Of course, this particular woman was exceptional and must be dealt with in an exceptional way . . . indulgently at first, because she was so very beautiful, and one was a man, after all—but firmly, oh, very firmly, before the "blunder," wilful or accidental, which she had threatened compromised the position of His Majesty's Secret Cabinet and jeopardised the reputation of its chief. The time had come to talk very straight. No use mincing words any longer, or feigning indulgence which one was far from feeling.

And he, too, braced himself for the conflict, not that he was in any doubt about the issue. He had a weapon in his possession which would soon turn the curl of defiance round those alluring lips into one of fear and supplication, and like an old Satyr, he savoured in anticipation the joy of seeing the sparkle die out of those mysterious eyes, and tears of self-pity course down those perfect cheeks.

Whatever else happened, the rebellious spirit must be crushed once and for all, and in such a way that it would never dare to rear its head again—not until he, Lucien Toulon, chief of His Majesty's secret police, was ready to cast this beautiful tool away. What happened after that he did not care. He had more than once got rid of tools that had become useless or dangerous. He served the Emperor—not France—because the Emperor paid him well both in money and honours: he was not the man to risk his reputation because of a woman's whim.

And while the Boulle clock ticked the fateful minutes away and the life out on the Boulevard seemed but the murmurings of a dream, Lucien Toulon weighed the words which he was about to utter. Finally he spoke:

"Beautiful Vicomtesse," he began quite slowly and quietly, "let us understand one another, shall we? You made the remark just now that you feared you no longer had the power to do what I, your employer, have the right to expect of you; and when I treated this remark as a joke, you declared that you had never been so serious in all your life. Now let me tell you this; I never was so serious in my life either. And these are my commands—my commands understand—to you: I expect you to furnish me with a copy of every dispatch which d'Ahrenberg will take to Vienna, and Nigra's secretary to Rome, during the next six months. I expect you to bring me the cipher of the new code which is being used by those two chancelleries, and I expect you to find

out who the traitor is who furnished Biot with plans of the new mitrailleuse. Now do you understand?"

He blinked at her from under his fleshy lids. She didn't move, and all she said was:

"Failing which, you will instruct one of your hired assassins to put a bullet into me. . . . Is that it?"

Then she added: "If you only knew how little I care."

But Papa Toulon—he became Papa Toulon all at once, gentle, suave, benevolent—only smiled, with the indulgent smile which a fond parent would bestow on a wayward child.

"No, no, my dear," he said, "I would not instruct a hired assassin to put a bullet into you. . . . Such rough and ready methods are all very well for ordinary rebels . . . not for you, the beautiful and elegant Vicomtesse de Lanoy, the idol of Parisian society. For her a bullet would be altogether too banal . . . we shall have to think of something else . . . something, what shall I say, more impressive. . . . We've all heard before now of lovely ladies being found dead in a house of ill-fame somewhere in a Paris slum, strangled presumably by a vulgar or disappointed lover . . ."

He paused and a kind of gurgle escaped him, and then a purr like a contented cat, for he had seen the shudder which had coursed through the delicate body. But she did not speak, and he went on blandly:

"We won't talk about that just now, nor of the sensation which the tragic end of so distinguished a lady would cause throughout the fashionable world of both continents . . . I have men—and women—on my staff who are past masters at working up these sensations and who will furnish the press of Europe with details of that lady's career which will do infinite credit to their powers of invention. But, as I say, we won't talk about that."

He put up his podgy hand and smiled, for he had seen the shrug, and caught the expression of lofty disdain with which Juanita had listened to these venomous threats.

"Oh, I know! I know," he said, with perfect suavity, "suicide, eh? Spectacular! What? The beautiful lady, exquisitely clad in priceless lingerie, found by her maid one morning, having taken an overdose of a sleeping-draught. Nerves! Disappointment in love! A romantic tragedy! I know, I know! But surely, my beautiful friend, I need not dot the i's and cross the t's for such a clever woman as you. . . . Let me assure you, once and for all, that such a romantic *mise-en-scène* would never be witnessed by anyone but your maid, who would at once communicate with me,

and everything would come out just as I have foreshadowed . . . the Paris slum, I mean . . . the scrubby hostelry . . . the unknown lover . . . and all the rest . . ."

Again a chuckle and a purr of satisfaction, for this time the shaft had struck nearer home. Papa Toulon had called "check" to his adversary. "Mate" would soon follow. Juanita, burning with indignation, cheeks ablaze, her eyes aflame, had jumped to her feet. She stood up straight and slim and tall, towering above that hideous, fleshy toad that was spitting venom at her. She tried to speak, but the very words which she would have uttered were choked in her throat before they reached her lips: they were words that would cover any decent man with everlasting shame. But Lucien Toulon was impervious to insults. He was a fanatic. He needed this tool for the work which he had planned and which he already had in hand. He had sworn to himself and had promised the Empress that he would lay before her the correspondence that went on between Paris and Vienna and Rome; no man or woman on his staff could get at that correspondence except the Vicomtesse de Lanoy. If he failed to fulfil his promise he would see himself shamed before his rivals, ridiculed, disgraced, sinking into obscurity. And all because of a woman's whims? *Allons donc!*

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Juanita now turned from him and walked with a firm step in the direction of the door. She was only conscious of one sensation, that of unutterable shame. All she wanted for the moment was to get away, to put death if need be between her and this loathsome brute. The thought that she had worked for him, taken orders from him, accepted gifts and money, seemed to scorch her very soul with an immensity of shame. Let him do his worst. No ignominy that could reach her, alive or dead, could be so great as that of being this man's tool. All the pride in her work was suddenly laid to dust: "I serve my country as best I can," she had proudly said once; but that was before she had realised the vileness of the motive power that impelled her.

"Do your worst," she murmured under her breath. "Anything in life or death will be easy to bear after this."

"Check," thought Papa Toulon again, and purred, and rubbed his hands against his fat thighs. He waited until he heard her turn the handle of the door and then he said quite casually:

"And don't forget, my lovely friend, that Gérard de Lanoy is not dead."

This made her pause, and she remained standing by the door, her hand on the latch. Wide-eyed. Listening.

A gurgle came from Lucien Toulon's thick throat.

"We ought not to have let him live so long," he seemed to be saying more to himself than to her; "but now he may as well go too. Sensation in society circles will be all the greater. I can see the headline in the press: 'Le Vicomte de Lanoy, long since thought dead, returns from exile, and learning that his wife was a spy in the pay of Prussia, commits suicide.' That really will be more than a nine days' wonder. Do you not think so, *belle amie*?"

Juanita held on to the handle of the door. She was not going to lose consciousness, even though the walls seemed to be spinning round and round, previous to coming down on her with a crash. But she held on and did not even sway. Thank goodness, the door was behind her tormentor, and that in his usual way he kept his hideous face averted. He could not see her. She could not help the blood rushing back to her heart and leaving her limbs icy-cold: but she could control her voice to a certain extent, at least —presently—she could.

Of course she knew that she was beaten. She had fought her fight for freedom and she had lost. This man held her by bonds which she could never break. To the end of her life, or until she was old, and weak and useless she would be his slave, for he had brandished a flail over her, which had reduced her will to nothingness. That flail was the name of Gérard—the threat to his life.

But she would not have him know that she had been hit. She tried even now to carry off the situation with a high hand, to feign assurance, pride, defiance, indifference, anything and everything except acknowledgment of defeat. She pulled herself together with a great effort, and came back to the side of that loathsome creature who was the most cruel taskmaster man or woman ever had. She tried to bluff, to steady her voice, to speak lightly, in a careless, easy tone.

"Gérard de Lanoy is dead, Papa Toulon," she said, "you assured me that he was."

Toulon chuckled.

"But you didn't believe me, did you?"

"Of course I believed you."

"That night—in the Hôtel d'Egypte? . . . What?"

"After that, I believed what you told me."

"That he had been shot at dawn?"

"Yes."

"And a month ago? . . . In Geneva . . ."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well! Let me tell you. Gérard de Lanoy is alive and you know it. You saw him in Geneva . . . more than once. You are still—very stupidly—in love with him. . . . He is alive, but he won't be for long, if you play me false. I could have had him shot any time these past two years if I had chosen . . . but I'm no fool . . . I thought the time might come when he would prove useful. . . ."

He paused a moment before concluding: "And it has."

"Checkmate, belle Madame," he said to himself, and then went on:

"Do not misunderstand me, *chère et belle amie*. If you play me false over this Austrian affair, I shall look on you as an enemy . . . and I shall strike back . . . I have told you what I hold in reserve for you . . . but let me assure you now, once and for all, that I also have something of the same sort in reserve—if you play me false—for Gérard de Lanoy."

The flail! It brought the poor slave to her knees. She said nothing for the moment. There was nothing she could say. As well ask the walls of Paris to come crashing down, as to think of moving this flint-hearted tyrant from his purpose. All hope of freedom lay shattered now: even the pale ghost of joy in an active life had vanished for ever. Even shame had ceased to be. There was only one thing left, and that was a few rags of pride. She gathered them together sufficiently to be able to speak in a detached, perfectly steady voice:

"Please! Won't you go now, Papa Toulon?" she said, and even contrived to smile. "It is nearly time for *déjeuner*, and I am due at Madame de Valabrègue's at one o'clock."

"*Mais comment donc*, dear lady?" And Lucien Toulon jumped to his feet with alacrity. "How time flies in such delightful company! . . . Twenty minutes to one . . . dear, dear!"

She touched the bell-rope. Toulon bent his broad back but he did not attempt to approach her.

"Well! That is understood then, my dear Vicomtesse," he said loudly enough so that any approaching servant might hear. "When may I have the honour of seeing you again?"

"I will send you word," she replied, "but I have many engagements this week."

The maître d'hotel threw open the double doors.

"Show His Excellency out," Juanita said coolly.

M. Lucien Toulon, Chief of His Majesty's secret police, walked backwards out of the presence of Madame la Vicomtesse. His

small feet tripped lightly over the parquet floor of the hall.

Juanita stood listening for a few seconds to the sound of those retreating footsteps; listening till the final echo of them died away; then only did she feel that she was alone, alone in her humiliation and her grief. She fell on her knees and rested her clasped hands against the back of a chair. She pressed her forehead against her hands:

"My God! My God!" she murmured. And then again: "Save him! Help him, O my God!"

CHAPTER 39

It was on her seventieth birthday—she was born in '42—that my dear Duchesse gave me some of the most interesting details of her life in Paris immediately before the war. There was tremendous excitement, it seems, over the suicide of Colonel Comte de Moirans de Sauveterre, one of the ablest and most popular officers on the artillery staff. There were very ugly rumours about him after his death—rumours which neither the war office nor the police attempted to deny. Plans of the new mitrailleuse, which had been kept a deadly secret by the war office, had undoubtedly come into the hands of the Prussian High Command. Not only that. Those in the know declared that a regular network of spying had been brought to light through the marvellous organisation of His Majesty's Secret Cabinet, whose chief, M. Lucien Toulon, did indeed deserve well of the country for his zeal and wonderful acumen. The names of all those implicated in the monstrous conspiracy had not yet come to light, but there was no longer any doubt that the Comte Moirans de Sauveterre was in it up to the neck.

"You have no idea, my dear," the Duchesse said to me, speaking about it all more than forty years later, "what a sensation the whole thing caused. Moirans de Sauveterre belonged to one of our oldest families in Brittany. He was connected with half our aristocracy, and intimate with all the *beau-monde* of Paris. The number of times I had danced with him, and the scores of times he had dined at my table! And then this suicide! And those awful

rumours! We all felt as if some of the odium attached to him was also clinging to us."

She gave a little sigh, and her glance softened as she said:

"Everyone was very sorry, in all this, for my sister-in-law, the Vicomtesse. I'll tell you why. She had obviously been very much taken with de Sauveterre, and he with her. There had been persistent rumours in society of their likely marriage. You may imagine how furious I was about that. Of course some of my original dislike of Juanita had died down during those two years. One could not resist her charm very long. Even I couldn't. She had a most extraordinary way with her. She absolutely fascinated everybody. The Duke was her slave. Even the Emperor—but there, I must not say that, I suppose. Anyway, though I never quite forgave her for what she did to Gérard, I could not help falling under her spell For one thing, her conduct in society was simply wonderful—dignified, reticent, entirely above reproach, although she was so young, so beautiful and so immensely admired.

"But when the gossip reached my ears that she was about to marry de Sauveterre, I was indignant. To give Gérard a successor! I considered it an outrage. An archangel would have been unworthy, and de Sauveterre was not an archangel. I tackled her about it and, though she denied it, I somehow suspected that she was not being frank with me. I am afraid I was rather hard with her that day, but I could not help it. I was boiling with indignation."

The dear old lady's eyes filled with tears. Frankly, I could not imagine her being hard with anyone, with that soft voice of hers and her wonderful gift of understanding.

"All the same," she went on, "I was very sorry for her when the tragedy came. So were a good many people. Not all by any means, for Juanita had her enemies. Mostly among women, of course. She was too beautiful and too much admired not to have some of the women against her, and there had been a good deal of gossip about her and de Sauveterre. It is amazing, my dear, how women—or men too for the matter of that—did talk and gossip and backbite at this time when not only the whole nation, but the country itself was just tottering on the edge of an abyss. You would have thought that in this year 1870 people would have other things to think about than whether Monsieur Un Tel was paying court to Mademoiselle Something Else, or who had given Madame X.Y.Z. that magnificent pair of diamond ear-rings.

"Personally I couldn't enter into the social side of Paris just then. My nerves were all on edge; nor was I the only one who

found our beautiful city an impossible place to live in. Hardly a week went by without riots and bloodshed in one part of the town or another. It was impossible to set foot outside one's gates without danger of being insulted or worse. Madame de Valabrègue had a diamond locket wrenched off her neck in daylight, in the open street. No one thought of interfering, or giving chase to the brigand. A couple of gendarmes who were standing close by never moved or stirred a finger. And old Marquise d'Armentières had an ear-ring torn out of her ear with such violence that the lobe was split. It was in a crowd, coming out of the theatre. There were a lot of roughs there who booed all the ladies and jostled them as they got into their carriages. The poor dear suffered agonies from the wound, and I am sure that the shock hastened her end.

"As for driving out to the Bois or the Champs Elysées in one's own carriage, it was out of the question. Stones were hurled at one or at the horses; sometimes the men were dragged off the box and beaten with sticks. I can't tell you what an awful time we all had. I can assure you that there were days when I envied my dear little Cécile in the solitude and peace of the convent. Did I tell you that she had taken the veil? Well, she did soon after she heard of Gérard's death. No one could blame her or wish to dissuade her. She had nothing else to live for. She had loved two men in her young life—each of course in a different way. Her brother Pierre and Gérard. Without them life must have appeared as a dreary, long-drawn-out martyrdom. She preferred to dedicate it to God and to the care of poor orphan children. It was a noble work, which in a way made her almost happy. I tell you I often envied her—both then and later."

* * * * *

"Of course we all knew that we were heading for war with Prussia," my dear old friend said to me on another occasion. "The Empress had set her mind on it. Our poor Emperor was so ill, he hardly counted, and though the Liberal government had to a great extent curtailed the Empress's power, her influence with Gramont and the crowd of sycophants who hung round her was still paramount. Although it was being daily drummed into our ears that the French arm was invincible, and that all that would be needed in the face of Bismarck's army would be "to blow on it" and it would be pulverised, there were quite a good many of us who had our misgivings. Some unpleasant rumours were flying about, and the Sauveterre business did not help matters.

"Those of us who had estates in the country felt that we ought to go and look after the poor people there. The Duke and I had already made up our minds to leave Paris for our place in the Valentinois, as soon as we could get away. Fortunately the weather suddenly turned very hot and sultry, and the Empress decided to go to St. Cloud. The Emperor had had a relapse and he needed a rest. This set us free and we decided to start immediately for Grignan. I asked Juanita to come with us, as I thought the change would do her good, and, frankly, I wanted to get her away from all the scandal-mongering and gossip to which her friendship with de Sauveterre had given rise.

"However, she refused. The Duke and I went south, and she remained in Paris."

* * * * *

Thus it was that Fanny de Lanoy was not in Paris when Gérard arrived there in the latter half of June. He had made his way up to the capital by easy stages. Short journeys in slow trains. Nights spent in villages off the beaten track. Tramping on foot or jogging along in any vehicle the driver of which happened to offer him a lift. Any device in fact for which opportunity arose, to cover his tracks. He let his beard grow, and plastered his hair over his forehead. He would have told you himself in those days that he looked a disgusting object. He was three weeks on the way between Armenasse and Paris.

He had no plans. He didn't know what he was going to do when he got there. But destiny impelled him as it had done before now. He would see Juanita, of course, without revealing himself to her. He would also see Fanny. But Lucien Toulon had warned him that the ghost of Gérard de Lanoy must for ever be laid to rest, or his manifestation would surely bring disaster on those for whom he cared most.

For days he remained *perdu* in an obscure hostelry in the Montparnasse quarter. During the course of his wanderings in the Faubourg St. Germain he noted that the mansion of the Duc de Lanoy was closed: the shutters were up, and there was no sign of life in the courtyard behind the grille. By dint of patience and discreet questionings he ascertained where the Vicomtesse de Lanoy lived, and thereafter as often as he dared he would tramp up and down the street on the chance of getting a glimpse of her. Not too often. Not every day, for that might arouse suspicion, but as often as he dared. Once he saw her in the Bois, on horseback, accompanied by a bevy of smart young men. Strangely enough he

felt neither bitterness nor jealousy. The joy of seeing her looking beautiful and happy seemed to efface every unworthy thought. The sight of her did him good. He had no definite plans yet, but he knew that presently he would make his way back into exile, and that after this he would be able to take up the threads of existence with more determination than he had done before. But this could only be after he had ascertained definitely that she was happy and had no need of him. For the moment he was possessed of a curious restlessness, of a certainty that she, Juanita his wife, was in desperate need of his love and protection. It was the same sort of feeling that he had experienced when he was in London, and an unaccountable force had driven him back to Geneva. Destiny! It was destiny, of course, that had driven him, compelled every action of his since then. And every one of these actions was a link in the chain forged by Fate. The traitor Biot, poor Anna, her suicide, his attempted rescue of her! France! his journey to Paris! . . . and now this feeling that Juanita his beloved was in need of his protection. Protection? The protection of a miserable vagabond, an exile without home or friends! The idea would seem ridiculous in itself, but it was terribly insistent.

* * * * *

It was during the course of his wanderings in quarters of Paris of which he in his happier days had never even heard, that he learned a good deal of the state of the country. Sitting in obscure cafés and cheap restaurants, he heard men talk, and after a time he joined in, in their conversation, made remarks, provoked discussions. If he had been a free man, how he would have loved to enter the arena of politics, to use the gifts God had granted him—eloquence, understanding, the influence of name and wealth—to bring the country he loved so dearly to a realisation of the impending catastrophe! He saw the rise and growth of communism brought about by crushing taxation and high cost of living, by dissatisfaction with the present and vague terrors of the future. He stood at street corners and heard Rochefort and Gambetta thunder against the present régime, the ineptitude of the Emperor, the ambition and fanaticism of the Empress, the weakness of the ministry. He saw the tendency towards revolution and anarchy, and heard matters discussed and projects made which foreshadowed the cataclysm that was already on the way.

One day he heard the Sauveterre incident discussed. It was in a café frequented by foreigners—Austrians, English, Italians—by journalists and commercial travellers, waiters and domestic ser-

vants. The whole business was discussed from various angles, and the opinion was freely expressed that ladies and gentlemen of the *beau-monde* had lately been enrolled on the staff of the secret service.

"It could not have been done otherwise," most of the men declared.

Other cases were recalled—notably that of young Durobert—the majority of which had ended in suicide.

An Italian who apparently was valet in an aristocratic house asserted positively that a lady of high degree was mixed up in it all.

"Of course her friends don't know it," the man went on; "my people don't know who it is either, but they are sure that it is someone in their own circle."

"My God!" an Englishman who looked like a commercial traveller exclaimed; "if such a thing were to come out . . . what a scandal! I remember in London on one occasion . . ."

The men put their heads together and sank their voices to a whisper; Gérard heard no more just then, but he went back to his obscure lodgings that night with nerves on the rack of apprehension. He knew, none better, who had ferreted out the secret of de Sauveterre's treachery. He had known the man in the past—a smart, capable officer, with a passion for women and gambling, and very little more than his pay to satisfy either. And Juanita's words kept on ringing in his ears: "I serve my country as best I can!" Yes! But, heavens above, what a cruel, ingrate service! Sublime patriotism might be its motive power, but what a risk! The brand of disgrace, social ostracism, contempt on the one side, and on the other—the official side—callous abandonment of a useless tool!

* * * * *

The Austrians who frequented the café were ostensibly journalists, but Gérard had strong suspicions that they held inferior positions in the secret service of their own country. They talked less than the others, and altogether appeared both more superior and more discreet. Gérard entered into conversation with one or two of them one night; the talk was on indifferent subjects, only lightly touching on politics. But presently they were joined by friends—Italians, Levantines, English and so on. They all sat round a table, with their heads together, sipping their absinthe and talking in whispers. They didn't seem to mind Gérard, who was the only Frenchman there. He looked like one

of themselves, with his shaggy beard and lanky hair, and clothes very much the worse for wear. Talk of secret service and mysterious denunciations was in the air. There had been a case in Vienna, where a high-born lady had been discovered in the apartment of the Russian chargé d'affaires ferreting among his papers. The Russian had had his suspicions, he had set a watch on the lady when she came to visit him. She was caught red-handed.

"I don't remember the name," one of the men said, "but I know she belonged to the very tip-top class in Vienna—a relative of the Emperor Francis Joseph, I've been told. You must know who it was," he said, addressing the Austrians collectively.

They, however, professed to know nothing—nothing more than what was given out to the press.

"I sent a report to my paper," one of them declared, "but the name was rigidly censored."

"But there was an awful scandal, wasn't there?" the Englishman asked.

"You bet there was," one of the others asserted. "Everyone in society turned against her, of course; the wretched woman was disowned by her chiefs, and in the end she shot herself. I had the story from——"

He was here interrupted by a sudden crash of broken glass. A sticky stream of liqueur trickled from the table down to the floor.

"Oh, what a pity!" the Italian valet exclaimed; "such excellent absinthe!"

"You've cut your hand, haven't you, Monsieur?" the Englishman inquired sympathetically, for Gérard's hand, which still clung to the stem of the broken glass, had started to bleed.

"It's nothing," Gérard hastened to say—"nothing at all. Only a small cut. I can't think how I could have been so clumsy . . ."

He wrapped his handkerchief round his hand and called: "Waiter, another absinthe!"

But the incident had sent the conversation drifting to other channels.

CHAPTER

40

A NIGHT or two later.

It was evening. Close on midnight. The café was no longer full. Gérard sat at a table with the two Austrians: the others had all left. The talk was of drama and music now; politics and secret service were eschewed.

The clock of a neighbouring church was striking the hour, when a man pushed open the swing-doors and entered the café. He made straight for the table where the Austrians were sitting.

It was d'Ahrenberg.

By the time Gérard saw him, he was already quite close to the table. Gérard rose and nodded to his friends.

"See you to-morrow," he said quickly, and reached for his hat. He had his back to d'Ahrenberg at the moment.

"Don't go," the latter said quietly: "I shan't be long with these fellows."

Gérard turned; the two men looked one another in the eyes, and Gérard knew that he had been recognised. D'Ahrenberg put out his hand.

"Don't go," he said; "I won't be five minutes."

Gérard took the proffered hand, but he was greatly disturbed, not to say shocked, at the ease with which his friend had recognised him. He hesitated as to what he would do. At one moment he thought of beating a retreat, but thought better of it and finally went over to another table and sat down. He would wait, he thought, and speak with d'Ahrenberg, who was his friend, and on whose discretion he knew that he could count.

D'Ahrenberg seemed to be giving instructions to the two men, who took these down in writing; he also looked over a number of papers which they handed to him. The interview lasted about ten minutes, after which the men bowed with great deference to d'Ahrenberg and finally left the café.

D'Ahrenberg now came across to Gérard and sat down beside him. He ordered black coffee, then he asked:

"Why didn't you let me know that you were in Paris?"

Gérard, his elbow resting on the table, his head leaning on his hand, made no reply, and d'Ahrenberg continued:

"You don't trust me?"

"My dear fellow——" Gérard protested.

"I don't blame you," the other broke in lightly; "were I in your shoes I wouldn't trust a soul either."

He waited a moment. The waiter had brought the coffee and set it down on the table. As soon as he was out of earshot, d'Ahrenberg resumed quite casually, as if the matter had been discussed before:

"You'll be just as safe in my apartment as you are in these slums."

"In your . . .?—My dear fellow," Gérard protested, "you don't suppose I would——"

"What?" the older man broke in. "Accept such simple hospitality as I can offer you? You are not serious. What's the good of a friend, I should like to know, if he can't render you a small service?"

"You call that a small service?"

"What else is it? Listen. We took to one another at first sight in London. I am a funny kind of fellow. I make very few friends; for that reason I am rather lonely at times. I am worried now and have one of my lonely fits. Come and keep me company . . . I need someone badly—someone I can trust."

"But, my God, man!" Gérard tried in vain to argue, "you don't know . . .!"

"I don't know exactly," d'Ahrenberg was willing to admit, "but I am a devil at guessing."

"You guessed?"

"Quite a good deal."

"That I was a fugitive from justice, perhaps?"

"No. Not that. But that you were—what shall I say?—in conflict with the police."

"I give you my word . . ." Gérard said hotly.

"Don't do that, my dear fellow. I flatter myself on being what these new-fangled people call a psychologist. You are one of those to whom one would give *'le bon Dieu sans confession'*—an excellent expression which exactly fits your case. Some day perhaps you will tell me all about it. Until then I am content to be your friend, and—if I may say so—proud to render you a small service. Hang it all!" he went on cordially as Gérard made no attempt to reply, "you may accept it in the spirit in which it is meant."

"You are a man in a thousand, d'Ahrenberg," Gérard said after a moment or two of silence, "but . . ."

"But you feel that you are safer in your slum dwelling than you would be in the Hôtel d'Egypte?"

Then, as Gérard made no reply to this, he went on earnestly:

"Let me remind you, my dear fellow, that diplomatic immunity would cover you if—as I propose and you consent—you become nominally my private secretary, and so become an employé of the Austrian Legation."

"I was not thinking of safety," Gérard remarked.

"What, then?"

"I could not accept your more than generous offer unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you will let me tell you just how I stand with the police."

"Of course I will let you—if you insist."

"I do."

And that is how Gérard came to tell the story of his life's tragedy to the one man who was able to appreciate the confidence. He told him about his friendship with Pierre du Pont-Croix; the latter's folly, his death, the message which he sent to Gérard, and which led to his, Gérard's, arrest while he was in the act of burning Pierre's private papers. He tried to give the older man some idea of the mental torture he underwent at the hands of Lucien Toulon, and of the condition imposed upon him if he wished to escape a shameful, degrading death. He told everything to his friend, in fact, except his love for the woman who had become his wife under such strange circumstances. Nor did d'Ahrenberg question him on that point. It is more than probable that, with the innate sensitiveness of a noble heart, he guessed something of this greatest of all tragedies. What motive, save that of an overpowering love, would have brought the exile back to France, where the threat of that same degrading death, which he had avoided once, still hung like the sword of Damocles over him?

When Gérard had finished speaking, d'Ahrenberg said quietly:

"Would it surprise you very much if I told you that, roughly speaking, I did know your story?"

"But how could you? People surely have stopped talking about me by now."

"In a way, yes. But one can't help moving in a certain set in Paris—your set, my friend—without hearing things. I know the Duc de Lanoy, your brother, and his charming wife intimately.

I have had business dealings with the Emperor's secret police. I have met the Vicomtesse de Lanoy in society. More than enough, I assure you, to help me put two and two together."

Before Gérard could say anything more, the waiter came to announce that it was near to closing time.

"Nous fermons, Messieurs," he said.

It was close on one o'clock. The two men paid for their drinks, and while the waiter went to get their change, d'Ahrenberg spoke once more, and this time with strange and impressive earnestness.

"Listen, my friend," he said, "for it is my turn to be frank with you. I am in grave trouble, or rather in difficulties. You know as well as I do the state of turmoil that international politics are in at the present moment. Bismarck on the one side, the Empress on the other, both fishing about for a pretext to declare war, and both angling for alliances or treaties of neutrality. In the midst of all that, I suddenly find that my private papers—some of them of immense international importance—are being tampered with. Not often, but invariably when they contain something of outstanding value. One day it was the draft of a treaty which my government is concluding with Russia. Another time it was the key of our new secret code. I cannot tell you how it worries me. Metternich is getting old, and he is very busy with social functions, so he entrusts everything to me, with the result that if anything should happen to go wrong, I shall be left to face the music."

He paused a moment and then went on:

"The spy, whoever he is, is, I must tell you, extraordinarily clever. I am an old stager in diplomacy, but I have never met his like before. I don't know in whose pay he is. He may be employed, for aught I know, by France, by Germany or England, or even by Russia or Italy. But this I do know—that he always strikes when I least expect it, with the result that I am on tenterhooks the whole time. I feel as if I were living over the crater of a volcano. It has come to this—that I cannot set foot outside my rooms without enduring agonies of terror as to what will happen in my absence. I don't know whom to trust, or whom to suspect."

Again he paused; the waiter came back with the change; he pocketed his tip and mechanically reiterated the formula: "Nous fermons, Messieurs!"

The two men rose and reached for their hats.

"If you would stand by me now, my friend," d'Ahrenberg said in the end, before they both left the café, "you would, I think, save me from dementia. It would only be for a few days. Events

are tumbling over one another just now, and any day Metternich may be recalled. In God's name don't say 'No.' Your consent would be the greatest act of friendship you've ever done in your life."

They had gone through the swing-doors by now. Outside the air felt close, with more than a threat of thunder. Vague rumblings in the distance merged with those of the traffic in the busy suburban street. Most of the cafés were closing, and belated customers trooped out through the doors or from under the awnings. Women in muslin dresses, men with their coats thrown open, thronged the exit of a music-hall close by. "Dieu! qu'il fait lourd!" was heard from every side. From the farther side of the great city came the faint echo of repeated rifle-shots.

"Encore une émeute!" the worthy bourgeois of Paris muttered, and hurried home to safety.

The two friends had come to a halt at the angle of the street. In the midst of that busy crowd they were as far from prying ears as they would be anywhere. Before hailing a passing cab, d'Ahrenberg suddenly said:

"Well?"

There was obviously a note of anxiety in his voice. Gérard hastened to retort:

"Tell me exactly what you want me to do."

"I want you to come and stay with me at the Hôtel d'Egypte, where I have a suite of rooms. You know the hotel, don't you? On the Place St. Roch?"

"Yes, I know it," Gérard replied simply.

"That is all," d'Ahrenberg went on. "Nominally you will be my secretary; and you and I will never be away from the apartment at one and the same time."

He turned anxious eyes on his friend.

"You won't say 'No,' will you?" he asked.

"Of course I won't," Gérard replied warmly. "You put life into me, by giving me something to think about, other than . . ." He broke off and continued more quietly:

"I could not anyhow go out into the open, except at night—and even then! because . . ."

"I know," the older man hastened to assure him. "So will you come to-morrow—or rather to-night, for it is morning already."

"At what time?"

"Say ten o'clock. It is dark by then. Give any name you like to the reception clerk. I will leave word to show you up at once."

"I'll say André Miroix. It doesn't really matter, does it?"

"Not a bit."

A cab came clip-clopping down the street. D'Ahrenberg hailed it, and while the *cocher* drew up to the kerb, he said to Gérard:

"I shall actually sleep to-night. You have made a new man of me."

"What do you think you have made of me?" Gérard retorted, smiling.

The two friends grasped one another by the hand. They were made to understand one another, these two.

* * * * *

It was not until after he was back in his lodgings and had thrown a glance into a mirror that Gérard received a more serious shock. He had thought himself unrecognisable. Yet d'Ahrenberg had known him, seemingly at first glance. The eyes of friendship had been very sharp. What about those of Toulon's gang? Well, he did not really care now what happened. He was content to drift. "Pauvre feuille détachée, où vas-tu? Je n'en sais rien." Destiny had taken him so completely in hand; if she led him back into the clutches of Toulon, he would not really care. The one being in the world whom he loved more than life had forgotten him. To her, he was as completely dead as if he lay in a felon's grave. But if she needed him he would be there: he would live just long enough to shield her—against what? He dared not think. He had embarked on this new adventure without any definite idea as to what he actually suspected and feared, but d'Ahrenberg's strange story of the mysterious spy haunted him throughout the night and the day.

As soon as darkness set in he went out to the nearest barber and had his shaggy beard removed and his hair re-trimmed and cut. Physically it was an immense relief. At ten o'clock he made his way to the Hôtel d'Egypte.

What a wealth of memories the place evoked!

Nothing was changed. The same servile porter ran out to help him out of the cab and took his valise. The same elegantly furnished vestibule charmed the eye by its shaded lights and its air of refinement and exclusiveness. The same immaculately turned-out reception clerk came forward to meet the new-comer, bowing with just the right amount of obsequiousness, and mincing his words.

"Monsieur désire?"

"Monsieur le Comte d'Ahrenberg."

"What name shall I have the honour to announce?"

"Monsieur André Miroix. His Excellency is expecting me."

"That is quite right, Monsieur. His Excellency did inform us of your arrival."

The immaculate clerk then called to a *chasseur*.

"Conduisez Monsieur," he commanded, and stood smiling by while Gérard followed the *chasseur* up the familiar stairs.

CHAPTER 41

THE sequence of events which made up the last act of that extraordinary drama were related to me by my dear old friend Fanny de Lanoy. Very little of it came out in the papers, chiefly, I believe, because the whole of the world's press was engrossed at the moment in matters of international importance.

In a round about way all the principal actors in the drama were involved in the wider issues; d'Ahrenberg, the Austrian chief secretary for one, also Juanita of course, Lucien Toulon, Gérard de Lanoy. I had heard so much about them all from the Duchesse that I seemed to know them intimately. Fanny also gave me various cuttings from the newspapers of the day, but the information they conveyed was only fragmentary. Still! what with her own narrative and these printed fragments I did not find it difficult to put together the various scenes of that amazing last act.

Gérard, it seems, took up his quarters in the Hôtel d'Egypte, where his friend Count d'Ahrenberg occupied a magnificent suite of rooms facing the Place and the old church. Gérard's rooms were on the same floor, but looking out the opposite way. Nominally he was Count d'Ahrenberg's secretary, but neither the staff nor any of d'Ahrenberg's friends ever saw him. He never once left his rooms and had all his meals served upstairs; nor did he put in an appearance if anyone else was there. The staff put him down as a misanthrope, and left him severely alone. It was said semi-officially that he was set to watch over the Legation correspondence, and this satisfied everybody.

This was the second week in July, and events in the political world were moving with bewildering rapidity. The Prussian prince had at the demand of the French government relinquished his candidature to the throne of Spain, but this concession did not

apparently satisfy the Empress. She wanted war and she was going to have it. All she needed was a pretext. The plebiscite last May had shown a majority in favour of the continuance of the imperial regime, with a strong liberal ministry, but that majority was insufficient in Eugénie's eyes. She knew—none better—how unpopular she and the Emperor had become. Nothing, she thought, but a spectacular war would ensure the throne for her son. She was not afraid of war. Its alternative was so obviously another revolution. And Bismarck, tired of this enervating peace, longing to put to the test the marvellous military machine which he had created, was playing into her hands.

The pretext was soon found.

The Empress—without consulting the responsible ministry, only the Duc de Gramont who was Minister for Foreign Affairs—persuaded her sick husband to send Count Benedetti over to Berlin to demand of the King of Prussia a written guarantee that he would never allow a German prince to occupy the Spanish throne.

Benedetti was somewhat arrogant in his demands. King William was slightly vexed and politely refused to give the guarantee. Bismarck, triumphant, did not hesitate to apprise the whole of Europe, that the French ambassador had been curtly dismissed by the King of Prussia. According to him it was a moral slap in the face for France. The whole of Paris was in a turmoil. War! war! Nothing but a devastating war, the complete humiliation of those arrogant Prussians could wipe out the insult. All were agreed as to that; the aristocracy of the Faubourg St. Germain made common cause with the riff-raff of the suburbs. Hand in hand they paraded the streets singing the Marsellaise and shouting, "A Berlin!" whilst the Empress, suddenly terrified at the monster which she had evoked sought with all the power of eloquence and persuasion at her command to secure the alliance of Italy and Austria.

War was declared on the 15th of July. On the 28th the Emperor with the young Prince Imperial left for the front.

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It was somewhere between those two dates that the curtain rose and fell on the last act of the drama. Gérard had been over a week in the Hôtel d'Egypte. Nothing untoward had happened. The spy, whoever he was, had for the time being suspended his activities. True, that nothing definite had occurred recently. There had been some correspondence between the foreign chancelleries in

Paris and their respective governments, but Vienna and Paris still held aloof; both powers were sitting on the fence, waiting to see who in the deadly game in which France and Prussia had engaged would win the first round. The Empress lavished her smiles and her eloquence on Prince Metternich and Count Nigra. Especially on Metternich, for the princess was her intimate friend. But friendship plays no part in diplomacy, and Metternich would not commit himself. He refused to disclose what were the intentions of his government.

The Empress summoned Lucien Toulon to St. Cloud.

"What is the use of a secret service," she asked acidly, "which has cost us millions, if we cannot ferret out an important thing like that?"

"Patience, Your Majesty," Papa Toulon replied with utmost suavity; "we'll find out in good time all we want to know."

"Why don't you see to it yourself?" the Empress retorted hotly, "instead of employing a lot of incompetent bunglers?"

"Patience, Your Majesty," Toulon reiterated unctuously, "the agent I am employing is more competent than your humble servant."

"Then tell him to be on the look-out," she commanded. "Princess Metternich let fall this morning that a courier from Vienna is expected in Paris within the next twenty-four hours, with an important letter from the Emperor Francis Joseph, bearing upon my request for his co-operation. I must have a copy of that letter within six hours of the courier's arrival, or . . ."

She paused a moment whilst Papa Toulon with eyes closed and a benign smile round his fleshy lips waited on Her Majesty's pleasure.

"Or my friend," she concluded in a dry, rasping voice and measuring her every word, "you pack up your traps and leave the direction of the Emperor's secret cabinet in hands that are more competent than yours."

Papa Toulon made no reply. He offered no protest to this threat of summary dismissal. What he had dreaded for some time had come to pass; the sword of Damocles was hanging over him. If Juanita failed him now, it would surely fall. A shudder went right through his fat body. It was the kind of shudder which he loved to see course through the veins of a subordinate when he, Toulon, thought fit to reprove and threaten. He had seen it course down the spine of his most exquisite handmaid, and gloated over it. He was getting something of his own back, for the Empress, with forebodings of impending disaster, cared as little about his past

services, his present difficulties, and possibly catastrophic future, as he did about the fate of his own subordinates.

* * * * *

On the following night there was a ball at the Austrian Embassy. The invitations had been sent out long before war had actually been declared, and it was by the Empress's express wish that no festivities or galas of any kind should be cancelled. She believed every word that Lebœuf, Minister of War, told her that the French army would march from triumph to triumph into Berlin, and whenever she stood on the terrace of her palace of St. Cloud and her eyes rested in the distance on the Arc de Triomphe, on its carvings and balustrade gleaming in the sunlight, she would see a vision of her son returning from the victorious conflict crowned with glory, acclaimed by the people, enshrined in their hearts—the fourth and greatest Napoleon.

She honoured the ball with her presence. The Emperor, on the other hand, was too ill to attend. The disease from which he suffered had made alarming progress of late, but he was nevertheless determined to leave for the front as soon as he was a little more free from pain. The Prince Imperial, however, was there, a charming and, to some, pathetic figure of a schoolboy full of enthusiasm and confidence. He, too, was preparing to go to the front with his father, and was counting the days until the happy hour of departure came along.

The streets were thronged that night. Bands of merrymakers paraded the city singing and shouting "A Berlin!" The whole town was illuminated. The smart ladies of the Chaussée d'Antin busied themselves with festooning their balconies with red, white and blue lamps and bouquets of poppies, daisies and cornflowers. At the Hôtel de Ville recruiting was brisk. Woe betide any man who would dare to emulate Cassandra and raise the warning cry of possible disaster. In the Chamber, Minister Lebœuf had declared solemnly that the invincible French army was more than prepared for any eventuality. "*Nous sommes cinq fois prêts*," he had said amidst thunderous applause. A patriotic bookseller on the Boulevard des Italiens had hung a huge band of calico above his shop with a flaring announcement printed on it: "The new French-German dictionary sold here, for the use of our brave soldiers in Berlin."

Enthusiasm for the war, the certainty of victory had reconciled all political parties and hushed every quarrel. Even Rochefort

ceased to harangue and Gambetta was silent. Golden dreams of glory had gone to every Frenchman's head like champagne.

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The courier from Vienna arrived in the afternoon. He brought an autograph letter from the Emperor Francis Joseph, together with the draft of the proposed secret treaty of neutrality between Austria and Italy. Metternich had confided both the letter and the draft to d'Ahrenberg, as he usually did.

"The Legation is honeycombed with spies just now," he said, "the papers are safer with you."

D'Ahrenberg hoped they might be. He had great faith in Gérard who, he knew, would not leave the apartment while he, himself, was obliged to put in an appearance at the Legation ball. In any case he was bound to obey his chief. He took the papers home with him, and locked them up in his bureau.

At nine o'clock he took leave of Gérard.

"I am leaving you in charge of very important papers to-night," he said. "I need not tell you how anxious I shall be all the time I am at that wretched ball."

"You need not be," Gérard said simply, "while I am here."

"I know that, my dear fellow. I can't tell you what a comfort your being here has been to me. But to-night I am not going to let you run too great a risk. I haven't tricked myself into the belief that the arrival of our courier is not known to that army of spies of every nation that infest Paris just now; and I am sure that it is no secret to any of them that I am usually in charge of important documents. There are at least three governments in Europe at this moment—besides the French—who would give a year's revenue for a sight of that draft I've got in there. So you may imagine how I feel about it."

Gérard smiled. "Nobody," he said quietly, "will get a sight of the draft while I am alive."

"Heavens above, man!" d'Ahrenberg exclaimed hotly, "I won't have you shot guarding the secrets of my government."

"Oh! . . . Shot!" Gérard rejoined with a light shrug.

"You know what I mean. . . . Some of those spies . . . Well! anyway, I'll tell you what I have done. I have got half a dozen of our own secret service men on the watch in the room at the end of the passage. If they hear anything suspicious, their orders are to allow the spy to get into this room before closing in on him. Presumably he has a pass-key to the door as well as a false one

to my bureau, and what we want is to catch him red-handed inside this room, rummaging among my papers; we can then hand him over to the police as a common thief. I don't know that they would do anything much to him—especially if he turns out to be one of Lucien Toulon's agents, but anyway there would be great satisfaction in getting a man like that discredited, and I promise you we'll make a fine scandal about it, especially if, as I say, he happens to be in the Empress's pay. Don't you think we've been wise?"

"Very wise," Gérard replied with an effort. "But you could have trusted me to look after your interests—alone."

"My dear fellow," d'Ahrenberg protested, "I would trust you with everything I have in the world. But though these spies are usually sneaks and cowards, there are some very fine fellows among them, who would sell their life or their freedom dearly if they were cornered. I myself have seen deeds performed in that ungrateful service that would put heroism on the battlefield to shame. I must tell you some of my experiences one day. . . . But I must be off now . . . that wretched ball. . . . Look after yourself, Gérard . . . I'll get back as soon as ever I can . . ."

At the door of the apartment he turned, seemed to hesitate a moment, then went back to Gérard and said with more than his usual earnestness:

"I can't help being anxious. . . . We've laid a trap for the spy, but the other side may have laid a trap for us—for you perhaps—Gérard! Promise me you will not venture out of the apartment unless our men are close by?"

"Of course I promise," Gérard assured him, smiling at his anxiety. "I am here to guard your property. I am not likely to quit my post."

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word. But why?"

"I don't know," the older man rejoined with a quick sigh. "Some sort of presentiment, I suppose. I seem to see in that dark corridor men lying in wait for you . . . or else . . ."

This time Gérard laughed whole-heartedly.

"My dear fellow! I have never known you given over to that sort of fancy. Don't think about me any more. I won't get into mischief, I give you my word. I won't leave my post—not for a moment—or fall into any *guet-apens* . . ."

D'Ahrenberg sighed once more; he didn't seem altogether satisfied; he gripped Gérard's hand with the firm grasp of a true friend.

"Well, anyway," he said, "so long as you don't do anything rash . . ."

* * * * *

In her sumptuous apartment in the Faubourg St. Germain, Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy was standing in front of her cheval glass while her maid put the finishing touches to her toilet.

"Madame is looking beautiful to-night," the maid said; "there will be no one so beautiful at the ball as Madame. Not even the Empress."

In the cheval glass Madame saw her own image. She was wearing black to-night with a garland of roses round her waist and roses in her hair. She also saw the maid's obsequious expression of admiration; the demure yet arrogant glance that met her own. She hated that maid who had been set to spy on her by Lucien Toulon; hated her more than ever since it was through her that Lucien learned that she, Juanita, had seen Gérard in Geneva.

Thank Heaven that no spy on earth could ferret out what she had felt and endured when she did see him—the man who still dominated her soul, and the memory of whose love was like a fragrant flower between the leaves of her book of life, the leaves that were the record of her youth, of her one hour of happiness, and of years of sorrow.

M. Toulon was announced.

"I'll see him in the boudoir," Juanita said.

The maid handed her her gloves, her fan, her handkerchief.

"Give me my cloak," she said. "I shall not require you any more."

With her cloak on her arm she went out to receive her chief. He looked worried. So worried in fact that he did not pay her his usual elaborate compliments.

"I came to tell you," he said after the first rapid greetings, "that I am setting a special guard over you for this business. In fact, I shall look after you myself."

"I don't want a special guard," she broke in impatiently. "I am quite able to carry the business through myself. And I would much prefer your being nowhere near."

Papa Toulon smiled, somewhat more wryly than he usually did.

"I know," he said with thinly veiled sarcasm, "that I am out of favour just now. All the same I am going to keep a watchful eye over you. I have an idea that our friend at the Hôtel d'Egypte has his suspicions. But he is obliged, of course, to put in an appearance at the ball, and I have most of the employées of the hotel under

my thumb. So I don't think that you will be running a very great risk. Still, one never knows. And this is such an important matter that I prefer to be close at hand in case you want me. . . . You won't even have to call me . . . I shall know pretty soon if you are in trouble."

Juanita did not appear to be listening to him. At the farther end of the room between the two windows there was a Louis XV console, surmounted by a large mirror. She stood in front of the mirror, patted her hair, arranged and rearranged the rose in her chignon, put on her gloves, carefully buttoned them, and finally, when Toulon had finished speaking, she merely said:

"Help me on with my cloak, will you?"

Obedient, almost servile, he put the cloak round her shoulders. As he did so he murmured:

"My dear, my dear, if you carry this through successfully for me to-night, I declare that I will never ask you to do anything for me again."

"Is this a bargain?" she asked coldly.

"On my word," he replied.

* * * * *

In one of the rooms belonging to the suite occupied by Count Felix d'Ahrenberg, special Chargé d'Affaires and Chief of the Austrian Chancellery in Paris, Gérard, his friend, sat waiting.

It was close on ten o'clock. D'Ahrenberg had gone off to the Legation ball, leaving his friend in charge of precious papers and diplomatic correspondence of incalculable value. Not a sound disturbed the aristocratic quietude of the Hôtel d'Egypte. No other visitors slept on this floor, and it was very seldom that a discreet step would echo down the long corridor on which the several doors of d'Ahrenberg's apartments opened on the one side and those of Gérard's rooms on the other.

In a room at the other end of the corridor half a dozen men of the Austrian secret service were on the watch in order to catch the spy red-handed and hand him over to the police as a common thief . . . whoever he was . . .

Or she?

When first he found himself alone in the salon, with the locked bureau seeming to stare and mock at him, Gérard certainly had no very clear thought that the spy might be Juanita his wife; that it might be she who would presently enter this room with one false key, open the bureau with another, and rummage among d'Ahrenberg's correspondence until she found the papers she

wanted, and that the men of the Austrian secret service would then come stealthily along and find her there . . . catch her like a rat in a trap, and raise a scandal about her that she would not willingly survive. He was not sure—not yet—if it would be she or not. But if it were . . . God have mercy on her and him.

He was haunted by the story which the Italian valet had told, of the Austrian grande dame caught in the act of tampering with the correspondence of the Russian chargé d'affaires . . . of the scandal . . . the social ostracism . . . the disgrace that drove her to suicide. At this point in his musings a coherent thought suddenly took possession of his brain and rooted itself there. . . . The idea that he must warn her . . . get at her somehow . . . in case it should be she. . . . But how? . . . How? when his word of honour given to his friend held him to his post . . . here inside this room.

"I am certain," the Duchesse said to me on one occasion, "that he knew for certain in his own mind by then that the spy was Juanita and no one else. Probably he would not have admitted it even to himself. He never spoke to me about that hour which he spent in d'Ahrenberg's salon, waiting for the sound of her footfall. Could any nerve-racking torment be worse than that? I doubt it. To wait . . . to be compelled to wait for the most awful cataclysm that could possibly befall any man who was both proud of his name and in love with his wife. . . . And he was compelled to wait you see . . . because there was his friend, that charming d'Ahrenberg, to whom he had given his word. Ah, my *preux chevalier*!" she sighed, "he had lived through many fateful hours . . . hours full of sorrow and of horror such as few men have experienced, but I do believe that the hour which he spent in that salon of the Hôtel d'Egypte was more unendurable than any that had gone before."

The dear old lady said a lot more than that and it was obvious that with every word she meant to hit at Juanita. And yet, thinking over the facts of the case even as the Duchesse herself presented them to me, I felt terribly sorry for that beautiful young woman who always seemed to me like a wild song-bird beating its wings against the bars of a cage.

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Half-past ten! Eleven o'clock! Quarter-past!

I so often think of Gérard de Lanoy sitting in the bay-window of d'Ahrenberg's salon, with heavy curtains drawn between him and the rest of the room. Waiting.

A shaded lamp at his elbow threw a warm glow of light in the bay. The room itself was in semi-darkness. On each side of the mantelpiece a couple of wax candles set in ormolu sconces flickered feebly in the draught, and left the distant corners in impenetrable shadow. He had a book in his hand, on which he vainly tried to fix his attention. Impossible, of course. It was as much as he could do to think at all. All he could do was to listen. Listen! And at the slightest sound he started, his every nerve tingling and the blood hammering away in his temples.

Half-past eleven.

In less than an hour, half an hour perhaps, d'Ahrenberg would be back from the ball and this mental torture would be at an end. But could any human brain stand another hour of it?

And suddenly there came a sound, different to any other that had come to the watcher's ears before. A slight scraping. The turn of a well-oiled key in the lock of the door. Gérard jumped to his feet. He drew one fold of the curtain soundlessly aside and peered into the room. What he saw through the semi-darkness was a cloaked and hooded figure standing beside the door, in the act of re-locking it. The next moment the figure turned and took a cautious step or two farther into the room. The cloak and the hood were black and enveloped the figure from head to foot. But suddenly the hood fell back from the face. It was Juanita.

In the dim light her face looked pale and set, her lips were parted and her eyes half veiled. Juanita, his wife, the beloved of his soul.

In less than a second Gérard was beside her. Had destiny been kind and played into his hands? Was there still time to warn her, to urge her to go back? Self-possessed as always, she smothered the cry that at sight of him had come to her throat. She threw him one quick glance. Just as if she understood. As if she had already realised the danger in which she stood. She turned her head one way and then another, looking about her like an animal trapped, trying to escape. Gérard tiptoed to the door. Would there be time? He peered down the length of the corridor. Here, too, the light was dim. On the walls at intervals, wax candles set in gilded sconces threw rings and shafts of light, but there were long, dense shadows in between and against the walls.

The well of the staircase was some fifty yards farther on, and beyond the staircase was the door of the room where the Austrian secret service men were at their post. The door of that room was closed. Gérard turned to Juanita and made her a sign, putting a finger to his lips. She moved towards him. And suddenly he put

out his hand. To stop her! He had peered out again down the length of the corridor. The door beyond the staircase was now open. The Austrians were on the watch.

A moment or two later, half a dozen men came out of the room and moved stealthily along the corridor in the direction of d'Ahrenberg's apartments. Nothing short of a miracle or an inspiration born of the immensity of love or the infinity of God's mercy could save Gérard and Juanita now.

Without another word or sign Gérard quietly relocked the door and was once more by the side of his wife. She had not made a movement since he had put out his hand intimating that her avenue of escape was closed. He now seized both her hands. She tried to free them, for she did not understand what it was he wished to do, but he held them tightly and she was powerless to resist. Her cloak slid down from her shoulders and fell in a heap on the floor. He was drawing her with irresistible force towards the curtains of the bay.

Neither of them had spoken a word as yet.

And now from the corridor outside there came the sound of footsteps. Stealthily but unmistakable. A scared look came into Juanita's eyes. She turned them appealingly on Gérard. All he said was "Come!" and drew her nearer to the bay.

The footsteps came to a halt outside the door and once more a key turned in the lock. Gérard quickly pushed the curtain aside and drew Juanita with him into the bay. He thrust her behind him and remained standing in full view of the door. It was thrown open and a shaft of light from the corridor flooded a portion of the room. It revealed Gérard standing between the curtains of the bay, and immediately behind him, the point of a satin shoe, and the edge of a black tulle skirt. And on the carpet in the middle of the room, a woman's black silk cloak lying in a heap.

A group of men had come to a halt in the doorway. Gérard, in a perfectly controlled voice, asked quite casually:

"Well? What is it? What do you want?"

The foremost one in the group, who appeared to be in command, came farther into the room and said:

"We are here by order of His Excellency . . ."

"Then why have you left your post?" Gérard demanded.

The man appeared slightly puzzled.

"Excuse me, Monsieur," he said, "but . . . are you His Excellency's secretary?"

"Of course I am."

"Then you know that His Excellency set us here to watch for a spy whom he suspects of tampering with his correspondence?"

"I know all that," Gérard said. "What about it?"

"Well, sir," the man replied, evidently more and more at a loss how to deal with the situation, "I and the men here saw a person . . . a woman . . . surreptitiously entering this room. She did not come out again . . . and . . ."

He stooped and picked up the black silk cloak which lay in a heap on the carpeted floor.

"And so is still here, you mean?" Gérard retorted lightly, "and that is her cloak. Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy is certainly still here, unless she has vanished into thin air. You are nothing if not logical, my friend. Again, what about it?"

"Monsieur . . ." the man murmured, "I . . . that is . . . we . . . we did not know . . ."

"You did not know that the lady who is here is Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy . . . Well, my friend, you know it now, and so . . ."

What Gérard left unsaid was obviously a peremptory dismissal. But the man held his ground.

"Mais, Monsieur le secrétaire," he said, speaking as curtly and as dryly as did Gérard himself, "I have my orders and . . ."

"Your orders are," Gérard retorted, "to lie in wait for a spy who is suspected of tampering with His Excellency's correspondence. You do not, I suppose, presume to think that Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy is here for that purpose?"

He said this in a harsh and aggressive tone. And the man, highly nettled, retorted hotly:

"It is just as easy to suppose, Monsieur le secrétaire, that Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy—if that is the lady's name—is in His Excellency's rooms at midnight for political purposes as for . . ."

"As for what, my man?" Gérard broke in coldly. He was on the point of saying something more, when all in a moment he paused, and a strange, indefinable expression came over his face. It might almost be described as one of relief, or as that of a man who suddenly perceives unexpected deliverance from some terrible impasse. He looked past the Austrian, to the door, where he had suddenly caught sight of the unwieldy figure of Lucien Toulon, together with a couple of satellites, pushing their way through the compact group of d'Ahrenberg's men who were crowded in the doorway. And it was the hideous sight of that bloated satyr, his arch enemy, that had brought the look of relief in Gérard's face.

With it had come the inspiration born of immense love and the infinite mercy of God.

He turned once more to the Austrian and after that one second's pause resumed coolly:

"Why should not Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy be at any hour she chooses in her husband's company?"

He had hardly finished speaking when there came a sudden cry from the curtained bay.

"No! That is not true!"

And Juanita, tall, exquisite, her beautiful shoulders caressed by the soft glow of the lamp, her tulle skirts billowing round her, thrust herself in front of Gérard. She, too, had caught sight of the fat, grinning face of Toulon, and seemed by her act to be standing between her husband and that cruel, implacable enemy. Lucien Toulon had in the meanwhile pushed his way through the group of men. He and his satellites were now in the centre of the room immediately facing Juanita. He was smiling with paternal benignity, and his voice was unctuous and smooth.

"What is it that is not true, dear lady?" he asked, directly addressing Juanita. "That this handsome and elegant gentleman is your husband? I can testify to the truth of that," he went on, turning to the Austrian, "Monsieur le Vicomte de Lanoy is known intimately to me, and I can only repeat what he so aptly said just now: why should not Madame la Vicomtesse be in her husband's rooms at any hour she chooses?"

No one spoke in answer to this. The Austrians were obviously disconcerted, and at a loss what to do. They held quick, whispered consultation together, while Toulon, still smiling, still suave, and almost obsequious, advanced a step or two towards Juanita.

"I cannot express to you, dear lady," he said to her, "how thankful I am that chance brought me here this evening just in time to save you from what might have been—thanks to our blundering Austrian friends here—an awkward situation for you.

"My carriage is just outside," he then went on; "might I have the honour of driving you to your apartment? Au revoir, my dear Vicomte," he concluded, turning to Gérard, "*à bientôt*! My men here will remain at your service until we meet again."

* * * * *

"There is one thing," the Duchesse said to me à propos of that memorable moment, "for which I will always commend Juanita. The Duke, who had a great admiration for her, always declared that when she faced Toulon, and realised by the fiendish

expression in his face that he meant death for Gérard and probably for her also, she behaved as no one but a born *grande dame* could have behaved. She must have been superb, I admit. Most women would have been carried away by emotions. Most women would have made a scene. Not so Juanita. She knew well enough that neither prayers, nor entreaties, nor tears, nor any of the appurtenances of melodrama would have availed with that abominable Toulon. As she was a religious woman she probably turned her thoughts to God. Probably she prayed. I know I should have done, for there was no mercy that she could expect, save from God. She never told me exactly how she felt. But I can easily guess. If I had been there . . . well, perhaps I should not have set my teeth quite so firmly as she did! She has a will of iron that woman, and I willingly pay tribute to the unflinching way in which she held up our racial traditions of pride and self-possession. She did not look at Gérard again—she was probably afraid she might break down. I don't know. I imagine that Marie-Antoinette or Madame Roland went to the guillotine in exactly the same way, with the same firm step, head erect, stiff upper lip, straight back, as Juanita did when she walked across the room, without taking heed of the brute Toulon.

"The Austrians stood aside to let her pass. Toulon's sleuths were standing in the corridor. Of course they could not touch Gérard while he was under d'Ahrenberg's roof, but he could not spend the rest of his life inside the Hôtel d'Egypte, and they would have him the moment he set his foot outside the door. I am sure he didn't care whether they did or not. He often used to say afterwards that he could never understand why he had ever bargained for his life and then fought for it for two years. Juanita was life for him. If he couldn't have her, he would rather have the grave."

The dear old lady sighed. Once again I saw that tender expression creep into her faded eyes. She murmured softly: "Strange love, theirs! I never quite understood it. It seemed to ask so little, and yet to burn with an immense passion that was also tenderness. . . . Ah, well!"

It is from the newspaper cuttings which the Duchesse gave me that I was able to gather what happened directly after Lucien Toulon had aimed his final shaft. Toulon himself exerted all the influence he possessed to keep the whole episode out of the papers. But he did not altogether succeed, and what happened was this: d'Ahrenberg came back from the ball. He was at the main door of his salon at the moment that Juanita, closely followed by

Toulon, was on the point of stepping out into the corridor.

Now what even Toulon and his sleuths didn't know, what neither Juanita nor Gérard could have guessed was that he, d'Ahrenberg, had been waylaid by one of his own men, at the entrance of the hotel, as he was stepping out of his carriage, and that this man, in as few words as possible, put His Excellency *au fait* of what had happened and was still happening upstairs. The move was the result of the whispered consultation held between the Austrian secret service men when Gérard's assertion, confirmed as it was by Toulon, had completely nonplussed them.

"Trust an Austrian grand seigneur," the Duchesse said to me on another occasion, "to do the right thing and say the right words at any time."

What d'Ahrenberg did do on this occasion was, on entering the room, to take Juanita's hand, to kiss it with his accustomed gallantry, and then to say lightly:

"Well, belle Vicomtesse, did I stay away long enough to give you a happy half-hour with your dear husband? Are you going back to the Legation?" he went on, and bestowed not a single glance on Toulon. "The ball has fallen rather flat. The Empress has already left. No one seemed in the right mood to-night. Gérard was wise not to go. I am going to be selfish enough to keep him here under my roof for a few more days, you know."

He was still holding her hand. She gave his a little squeeze, the only expression of gratitude she could indulge in, with all these men still standing about.

It was after that that she went, and Toulon sneaked out of the door in her wake, followed by his satellites. The Austrians then bowed themselves out of the room.

CHAPTER 42

On the 28th of July the Emperor Napoleon and with him the young Prince Imperial—he was only a schoolboy—left Saint-Cloud for Metz. The Empress herself drove them to the station in her pony carriage.

A week before that, Madame la Vicomtesse de Lanoy had a private audience of the Emperor. What she said, how she pleaded,

what words of eloquence she found, no one knows. Certain it is that the Emperor, on the eve of one of the greatest tragedies that ever befell a dynasty and a nation, did with a flourish of his pen put a stop to one tragedy, the *dénouement* of which he was able to control.

He granted Gérard, Vicomte de Lanoy, a free pardon, on condition that he enrolled immediately in one of the regiments that were ordered to the front. The condition need not have been imposed. Gérard was only too happy to go. He fought at Sarrebrück and at Wissembourg and was severely wounded at Forbach.

"I first saw Gérard again," Fanny de Lanoy said to me, "a week after he had received the Emperor's pardon. I was still in the country at the time, but Juanita sent me an urgent message, begging me to come to her immediately. With that Sauveterre story still in my head I was afraid that she had got again into some sort of trouble, so I had my things packed up at once and took that abominable train to Paris. I will leave you to imagine what I felt when Juanita broke the news to me that Gérard was still alive, and that he had received a free pardon from the Emperor, so that he would be safe in the future from the machinations of that abominable Toulon. I arrived in Paris just in time to bid him God-speed, for he left for the front the next day.

"Juanita and I were together in Paris all through that awful August and September when one terrible news after another, news of defeat and disaster came crowding in on us almost day by day. I won't talk to you about all that . . . the ridiculous hopes with which we were hoodwinked, until gradually we all woke to the reality of the one awful fact that our army was hopelessly defeated and that France had already begun to tumble into an abyss out of which she has not yet risen—if she ever will. The Empress monopolised a great deal of my time. I was with her when the Emperor's letter came telling her that the Prince Imperial had received his baptism of fire at Sarrebrück. I was one of those who tried to keep those scurrilous newspaper articles from her, which cast the mud of spiteful ridicule on the boy after that, calling him 'the cannon-ball baby.' I was actually beside her when she received the news of Sedan. My dear! it was awful! What she suffered in disappointment and humiliation is past belief. But, as I say, we won't talk about that. You will want to know more about my *preux chevalier* and his wife. I quite got to like her during those first weeks of the war, when she and I seemed rather lonely in Paris and were thrown so much in each other's company. Thoughts of Gérard were common ground between us.

"I was lucky enough to be able to go down to Lyons and see my little Cécile in her convent, before railway communications became impossible. I wanted her to know about Gérard. And there were we, three women, all thinking of him constantly, always talking about him, and daily praying to God to bless and keep him. All three of us. Sometimes I have wondered which one of us loved him best. Which one of us loved him as God would wish His elect to be loved of women.

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"After Forbach, when Gérard was brought home mortally wounded as we thought, life did indeed seem unendurable to me. Thank God his splendid constitution and the tender care lavished upon him helped to pull him through. He was, of course, with us all through those terrible months while the Prussians sat round Paris and just starved us out. What we all endured you can best gather from the newspapers of the time. One day I will tell you some of my experiences. They will fill another volume for you, and I won't intersperse them with sentimental episodes. Honestly, I don't think that I ever felt bitter or jealous again about Juanita. The terrible ordeal we all went through during those weeks and months while we watched our beloved country sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss of humiliation, brought us closer together than a more commonplace and uneventful life would have done! I saw, and I believe that I learned to understand, the immense love those two had for one another. They understood each other so perfectly and they had all their tastes in common. Their love was such an extraordinary mixture of tenderness, comradeship and passion—oh! there was plenty of that too!" the dear old lady added with a quaint little sigh; "in fact I always think of Juanita now, not as one woman, but several—a harem in fact—and as all men are by nature polygamous, she satisfied—completely—my fastidious chevalier."

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"We were all of us together in Paris, all through the siege . . . and then during that awful Commune. To this final terrible cataclysm, which saw the destruction of some of the most beautiful buildings in Paris and very nearly caused that of her magnificent art treasures, I do owe one consolation. The mob invaded the bureau of the Commissariat of Toulon's secret police. It was a particularly unpleasant mob who made short work of men like Lucien Toulon. What happened to him I will leave you to guess.

I won't dwell on it. I never knew if he had any family or home life of his own, but apart from that I am certain that no man ever died so little regretted or mourned as that inhuman brute. We are commanded to love our enemies," the dear thing went on in her quaint way, "and not to wish them evil, but we are not forbidden to rejoice if evil comes to them through outside channels."

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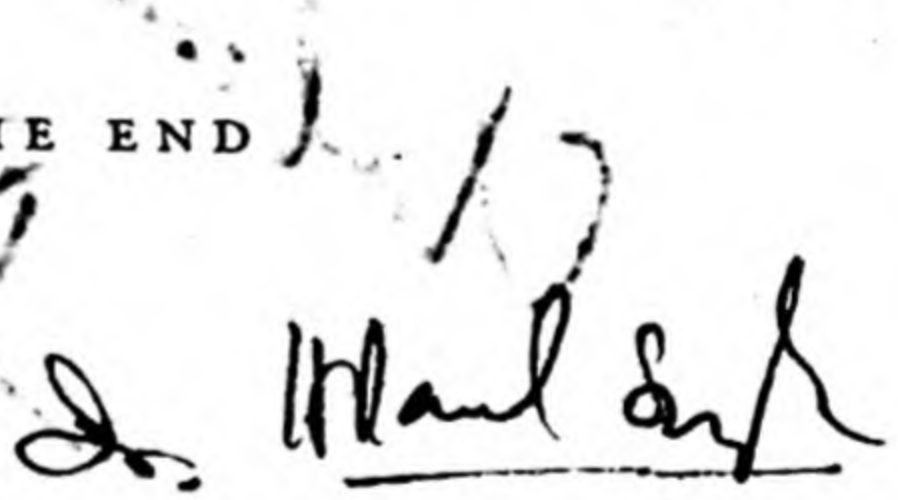
It was in 1872 that Gérard de Lanoy and his wife paid a flying visit to Geneva. He had a great fancy to revisit a scene where he had suffered so acutely, and where so many strange events had crowded in, on two years of his life. He also had a great desire to see his friend the old newsvendor again—the man who had played such an important if unconscious rôle in the drama that began in tragedy and ended in immeasurable happiness.

But there was another man now in charge of the newspaper kiosk. Gérard inquired about his friend. It seems he had died the previous year during that very severe winter. He had had a seizure in his kiosk one day. He was taken to the hospital, but only lived a few days after that. Kind friends busied themselves with his affairs. He had a little bit of money put by, enough to pay for a decent funeral and a simple slab over his grave. Gérard found his way to it, and he and Juanita left a bunch of flowers on the stone slab together with a sprig of rosemary for remembrance.

THE END